

Shatter: Break the Glass {Part III} by midas_touch_of_angst

Series: Shatter (Stranger Things) [3]

Category: IT (2017), Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Action/Adventure, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Alternate Universe - Modern with Magic, Alternate Universe - Superheroes/Superpowers, Flashbacks, Gen, Implied/Referenced Suicide attempt, Lots of Angst, Panic Attacks, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Superheroes, so much angst you guys, vigilantes

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Dustin Henderson, Eddie Kaspbrak, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Gretta Keene, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Kali Prasad, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Hanlon, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris, Steve Harrington, Will Byers

Relationships: Ben Hanscom & Eddie Kaspbrak, Ben Hanscom & Mike Wheeler, Ben Hanscom & Stanley Uris, Beverly Marsh & Richie Tozier, Bill Denbrough & Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough & Mike Hanlon, Bill Denbrough & Richie Tozier, Eddie Kaspbrak & Mike Wheeler, Eddie Kaspbrak & Stanley Uris, Eleven | Jane Hopper & Beverly Marsh, Eleven | Jane Hopper & Kali Prasad, Eleven | Jane Hopper & Richie Tozier, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Will Byers, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington/Nancy Wheeler, Kali Prasad & Nancy Wheeler, Maxine "Max" Mayfield & Richie Tozier, Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Richie Tozier & Mike Wheeler, Richie Tozier & Nancy Wheeler, Stanley Uris & Mike Wheeler, The Losers Club - Relationship, The Party - Relationship, Will Byers & Beverly Marsh

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Summary:

The Party- several teen superheroes and four powered chaperones- find themselves in Derry, Maine, to team up with the remains of the Losers Club. Their job is to destroy the Lab and rescue their kidnapped friends. But at the same time, El is suspicious of one of the Losers- does he know more than he lets on? And what are all the Losers trying to hide from them?

Meanwhile, Mike desperately tries to keep himself from falling apart while inside Hawkins Lab. The only people he can trust in the building are three other boys being held captive, but even with them, he may not be able to hold onto his hopes of freedom for long.

Superhero AU, Part three of a three-part series. Updates daily from 3:00-4:00.

Part I {Pirouette in the Dark}: https://archiveofourown.org/works/13575153?view_full_work=true

Part II {Spiral Into the Unknown}: https://archiveofourown.org/works/14069421?view_full_work=true

Rated Teen and Up for Swearing and Violence.

1. Catch Me, I'm Falling...

Notes for the Chapter:

QUICK NOTE: If you haven't read Part I, this will probably confuse you a LOT. Here's a link to Part I, "Pirouette in the Dark": https://archiveofourown.org/works/13575153?view_full_work=true

CHAPTER ONE

Catch Me, I'm Falling...

He couldn't feel anything anymore.

He didn't even realize he was conscious. Was he conscious? Was he awake? Was he even there? He couldn't feel his legs, or his arms, or his head. He felt like he was floating, floating above everything else.

"Holy shit!"

Someone had said something, but he wasn't really listening. He couldn't really listen. He felt dizzy, fuzzy, lightheaded. Lost.

"Holy shit, Richie! What the fuck are you doing here? Guys! Guys, they got Richie! They got Richie!"

He'd never really understood the phrase "in one ear and out the other" before, but that was what was happening to him right now. He heard words, whole sentences, but he wasn't processing any of it. None of it was even entering his thoughts.

"Don't touch him!"

"I wasn't gonna!"

"What is wrong with him?"

“He’s not saying anything! What did they do to him?”

“They fucked him up!”

Three different voices, and he didn’t recognize any of them, and he didn’t care.

“Figure out what’s wrong with him! Ben, what the fuck is wrong with him? What did they do to him?”

“Calm down, Eddie, I’m trying to figure it out.”

“What if they killed him? It’s like that fucking movie, that one with Jack Nicholson! You remember, the one that Bev made us watch cause her Aunt really liked it?”

Someone might have been grabbing his arm. He didn’t know. He didn’t care.

“That one with the guy named Billy with a stutter and we thought it was cool until he fucking died? That wasn’t fucking cool! He fucking died and they lobotomized Jack Nicholson! They lobotomized him and the Chief guy smothered him with a pillow!”

He was dizzy again. The world was spinning around him, but at the same time, he couldn’t feel himself. He still couldn’t feel his body, and everything was blurry and every now and again it was black.

“Shit, shit, shit, what if they killed Bill? What if they killed Bill and now we’ve gotta smother Richie with a pillow? I don’t want to smother Richie with a pillow, I don’t want him to fucking die!”

“We’re not going to kill Richie. Now, shut up and let Ben focus. You’re not helping anybody by panicking.”

“How the hell am I supposed to *not* panic? In case you haven’t noticed, Stanley, we’ve been kidnapped by those fucking crackheads-”

“Shut up.”

He was tired. He was so tired. He felt like couldn’t keep his eyes open; not

that it mattered. He wasn't processing anything he was seeing, either.

“Okay, okay. I think I might have got something.”

“Well, what is it?”

Nothing mattered.

“I’m not sure. It’s kinda hard to tell...”

“Spit it out, Hanscom!”

“Okay, fine. This kid’s been drugged outta his mind.”

He was floating. He was floating or he was falling. He was falling.

“Why would they kidnap Richie just to drug him? They didn’t drug us.”

“Well, there’s the problem.”

“What problem? What the fuck are you talking about?”

Falling...

“This kid... this kid isn’t Richie.”

Falling...

“What are you talking about? Of course it’s...”

“No, Ben’s right. Ben’s right, look. His hair isn’t as curly. His freckles are lighter.”

Falling... falling...

“But it looks just like him! Without the glasses, obviously. Why would they take his glasses?”

“Cause it’s not Richie! He’s got a different energy, it’s really someone different. Look, maybe his power is shapeshifting. Maybe he shifted into Richie.”

He was floating and falling and he couldn't do anything to stop it. But he didn't want to. He just wanted to sleep again. Why had he woken up? He wanted to sleep...

“Why would he shift into Richie?”

“What if... what if they *think* they have Richie, and this kid is pretending to be him?”

He wanted to sleep...

“Fuck! Oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck!”

“We have to take care of him. We have to save him, too.”

“Let's save ourselves first. God knows how long we have before they separate us again.”

Why couldn't he sleep?

“I don't want to get separated again! Not if they're gonna... if they...”

“We haven't got a fucking choice, not until we can get out!”

“Then let's get out! We're only eleven floors up, Stan can probably fly us out...”

He'd heard something. Again, he wasn't processing, but something stuck with him. He'd said something important, something that his mind had caught onto. Something that told him to fight, to stay awake. What had he heard?

“I told you, Eddie, I *can't*. They've got something on my back, something that stops me from shifting. And I'm not jumping *eleven* fucking floors.”

Something was there. Something had been said. Something that made him want to fight. That made him want to stop floating.

“We can try to climb-”

“We'll find another way out. We always do. They're not going to

win."

It was slipping away from him again. He was slipping away...

"The others will find us. They will. Don't worry."

"They're going to die. We're all going to die. They're going to kill us all."

He was falling, and then his vision went black, and stayed black. He'd passed out.

He was floating.

Notes for the Chapter:

Alright, so, here's my heads-up info for this fic:

- If you've read the rest of my series as a ST fanfic but haven't seen it- next chapter is a quick recap of everything you need to know, and then you should be good. However, I would suggest watching the movie- it's amazing!

- As mentioned in Part I and Part II, I did a lot of research for this, including looking up other Superhero AUs to make sure they weren't too similar. This also included research on how to accurately write PTSD. Should any of my portrayals of PTSD, PTSD Flashbacks and Anxiety/Panic Attacks be wrong or accidentally offensive, PLEASE let me know so I can fix it.

- This is EXCLUSIVELY crossing over with the 2017 version of IT. While elements from the book and miniseries may be mentioned, the 2017 film version is the primary influence; as such, some things from the book may be contradicted, as they were changed/not mentioned in the film.

- This Part will be LONG!

- I'll try to post any possible trigger warnings at the beginning of each chapter, but if I forget one, please let me know!

- Thank you all for reading my fic! Love you! :D

~ Midas

2. A Bit of Backstory

CHAPTER TWO

A Bit of Backstory

Three Years Before

“Welcome to the Losers Club, asshole!”

Richie swung the bat, hitting the clown- or *whatever* it was- across the face. And just like that, the fight was back on.

Honestly, Ben hadn't expected to spend his first summer in Derry like this. His last several summers had been pretty uneventful- the coolest parts had been being able to go to the Library all day instead of just after school. His Mom had joked about homeschooling him there before, but she wouldn't have had the time- she worked too much. Now, though, the Library Closing Hours were the least of his worries.

Because that Summer, he'd gathered with six other kids, the other six kids in the neighborhood that nobody seemed to like, and they all realized that they'd all been haunted, haunted by a shapeshifting creature that appeared mostly as a clown. There was stuttering, depressed Bill Denbrough, who kept seeing the ghost of his dead brother floating around town; there was Eddie Kaspbrak, the anxious hypochondriac, who'd been chased the a leper; Richie Tozier, who'd had his glasses broken by Henry Bowers more than once for never having a filter over his mouth, hadn't told the others what the clown had become for him, but Ben was pretty sure it had something to do with his nervous reaction to a fake missing poster; Stan Uris, easily the only one of the group to have an ounce of common sense, had seen a creepy painting in his Dad's office come to life in front of him; Sweet, kind Mike had seen the burned hands of his deceased parents trying to crawl through the edge of a door; and then there was Bev-beautiful, brave, Bev- who had tons of blood shoot out of her sink to

coat her bathroom. Her blood had been unseen by the adults. Everything had been unseen by the adults- even Ben's fear, which was a headless boy he'd read about too late at night.

So the kids had set out to take care of it themselves. And after some... minor setbacks (they'd have to deal with Bowers's body sooner or later, Ben assumed), they'd arrived in IT's lair- the middle of the sewers. And they were fighting it now, with whatever weapons they had nearby- God, they should've brought more than Mike's gun, which was now unloaded.

Mike rushed past Ben, slamming at IT with a metal pipe. The clown's face opened up, hands reaching through, grasping for the boy, disembodied voices calling for him. Mike strained, still pushing the pipe closer, trying to block out the sight before him. Stan suddenly ran forwards, slamming another pipe onto IT's legs. As the clown turned, Richie slammed into him again, while Bev picked up a block from the ground and threw it, hitting it into the side of IT's head, but the shapeshifter had already changed his face to Stan's Father's painting, rushing for him.

Instead of screaming, Stan threw the pipe, knocking her away. Mike hit IT again, too, and the clown pushed him over, before turning its arms into claws, stabbing towards him as Mike rolled. The other kids yelled, rushing forwards to try and help. Ben got there first, stabbing through IT's back with a sharp stick he'd found on the ground. IT roared, keeling back, as blood spurted from IT's stomach and into the air.

Suddenly, paper flew out, grabbing onto Ben, dragging him closer. The clown was trying to shift into a mummy, trying to scare him into giving up, into giving in. Ben was about to scream, when he heard Bill beside him, yelling, grabbing chains off the ground. IT paused, hearing him.

Ben then let out a yell, yelling to draw the attention back to him as he kicked forwards, trying to hit IT, to keep IT from his friends.

But as he yelled, something happened.

He felt something deep inside him, something light and pounding and

shocking and *warm* . It rose up with his voice, so he felt as if he was throwing up when he wasn't- he *wasn't*, right? The clown leapt back, some unholy screech echoing from it. But, more worryingly, Ben's friends were screaming, too.

It was quick; his friends calmed after only a second, gasping and doubled over. Ben staggered back, horrified, a memory emerging in his mind, a memory of the day before his Mom made him pack up in a hurry to go to Derry; he had been being bullied, and the bully had grabbed him, trying to pull him off. Ben, just wishing he could go away, slapped him and told him to shut up.

The boy had stared at him, and then crumpled to the ground, suddenly completely exhausted.

His Mother had made them move without a word after he'd told her what had happened, and he'd thought maybe she just got another job offer and didn't want to talk about him being picked on. But now...

Shit. He'd done something, hadn't he?

He found out much later that his power was energy-controlling. He could make people more awake or more asleep, yes, but he could do something else. He could open up previously closed energy channels. Like unawakened power.

IT recovered pretty quickly, and it instantly turned and rushed at Bill. Bill managed to get up fast enough to notice, and he instinctively dropped the chain, throwing out his hands.

A bright cloud of yellow energy burst forth, throwing the clown back.

Everyone stared in horror, including Bill, who said, "What the F-F-F-FUCK?"

There was a long pause, before Mike said, "Well, guess the cat's out of the bag now."

And before anybody could say anything else, Mike threw out a hand towards IT, and a blast of ice hit it into the wall.

"What the *fuck*?" Richie yelled.

IT jumped up again, and before Mike could do anything, it rushed for the nearest kid- Eddie. Eddie screeched as something sliced against his stomach, and they all yelled for him, only to stare, shocked, as Eddie stumbled back, completely unharmed. IT stared for a minute, before whipping around for Stan, roaring. Stan also threw out his hands, but nothing burst out of them: instead, his fingers turned to claws, slicing into IT's chest and causing blood to splurt all over him. As he screamed in confusion and pain, Bev rushed forwards, yelling, "Stan!"

"Bev!" Bill and Ben both yelled, and Bev jumped at the clown. She pulled Stan out of the blood flow, and thrust her free hand towards the clown. Instantly, the flowing blood shot back at the clown, surrounded by a dark black cloud that spread from her fingers.

The kids all turned to each other as the clown struggled to get back up, all horrified and confused. As they did, Richie rushed forwards, grabbing onto Mike's arm. Suddenly, his eyes flashed blue, and he ran forwards, shooting out a blast of his own, stabbing a shower of icicles into the clown.

IT screamed, before dropping forwards in front of Eddie again, its face flickering into the Leper again. Eddie screeched, kicking its stomach, saying, "I'm gonna fucking kill you!"

The clown dropped down, and then turned, its face turning more... human. Ben didn't recognize the face, but it turned to Bev, who had just helped Stan back to his feet, gripping a sharp pole in her hand.

"Bevvie," it said in a dark voice, "Are you still my little-"

Bev screamed, stabbing the clown in the face with the pole. As she did, more black mist emerged from her hand, pressing into the face, burning it.

The clown slowly stumbled backwards, the staff falling off of his face. The kids moved forwards, still trembling, still confused, but still together.

"That's why you didn't kill Beverly." Bill said silently, as the clown started to tremble. "Cause s-s-s-she wasn't afraid."

The kids all looked at each other. They were completely confused, yes, but scared was one thing they weren't. If anything, they were *invigorated*. They could do *anything* to this fucking clown. *Anything*.

"And we aren't either." Bill said. "Not anymore. Now *you're* the one that's afraid. Because you're gonna starve."

The clown started to mutter under its breath, saying something Ben could barely make out, "He thrusts his firsts against the post and still insists he sees the ghost..."

As they rushed forwards, prepared to beat it again, the clown toppled backwards, grabbing onto the top of a long pipe, about to fall. As it held, the children could see its face start to *shatter*, falling into the air.

As they were all focused on the clown, Stan slowly looked down to the claws- talons?- on his hands, letting them retract, and he shook slightly.

IT stopped suddenly, whispering, "Fear..."

And then it fell.

They stared after it, and then looked to each other. Richie was the first one to speak.

"What the *fuck* just happened?"

The second they'd all climbed out of the sewers, they were met by Police Officers and dragged off to the station. As they waited in the hall, trying to figure out what they were supposed to say, they wondered if anybody could see the sewer water that dampened their clothes, or their blood, or the scratches and tears. When they were as alone as they could be, Stan leaned over and asked, "Do you think the powers... do you think the powers could be... related to IT?"

Ben paused, but didn't say anything. After a second, Mike said, "My powers have always been here. Anyone else know...?"

“I think mine.” Ben finally said, as everyone else shook their heads.

At that moment, the door opened, and an officer entered, staring at the kids. “Alright, what the hell did you do?” he asked, as the door slammed shut behind them.

“Wh-wh-what do you m-mean?” Bill asked, as everyone fell silent.

“I mean that at least four people are dead, and then we find you coming out of the sewers covered in blood.” the man said. “Not to mention the other missing-”

“F-f-four?” Bill asked, startled.

“Officer Bowers,” the man said, “Stabbed to death. Al Marsh bled out onto the bathroom floor, and two teens were found dead in a car, probably also stabbed. Henry Bowers is also missing. Do you kids have an explanation, or-”

All of the sudden, Bev burst into tears. The boys jumped, startled, as she said, “Oh, O-Officer, it- it was *awful!*”

The boys all glanced to each other, confused; they’d never seen Bev *this* emotional before. The Officer, however, softened slightly, kneeling in front of her chair. “What? What... Miss...”

“Bev.” Bev said, wiping her tears a little. “Bev Marsh. I’m Al’s daughter and he’s d-dead and it’s b-because of H-Henry...”

The boys all stiffened a little, as Stan and Richie both glanced to Mike.

“Henry Bowers?”

“H-he k-k-killed him.” Bev said, starting to sound a lot like Bill with how much she stumbled over her words, her tears coming as easily as her lies. “He was ob-obsessed with me, wanted me to k-kiss him, I think. He came into our apartment with a knife and hit my D-Daddy with the toilet bowl lid and knocked him out, and I tried to fight him but he dragged me to the sewers. There were... there were bodies down there, and I thought he was going to- to-”

At that, Bev burst into more sobs, wrapping her arms around Ben, who blushed a little. The Officer kept his face wooden, but the boys thought her story was working.

"We- we saw Bev go into the sewers." Richie said after a while. "We were hanging out and saw him drag her in, and we went in after her. We had to fight him, and he..." Richie struggled not to look at Mike here. "He fell down a big hole. We're not sure what happened to him."

The Officer stared at the kids, as they slowly nodded, with Bev still sobbing. He said, "I'll be right back," and then he left.

The second the door closed, Bev let go of Ben, her tears suddenly gone. "That was way easier than I thought it'd be." she said.

"Jesus fuck, Bev, you can cry on command?" Richie asked.

Bev shrugged, smirking a little. "I figured that the sad damsel would play to the cop's pity card."

"So, we're blaming Henry for all of this?" Stan asked.

They glanced to each other, and then Bill said, "So, who do we have to bl-blame for the superpowers?"

They glanced at each other, and then Eddie said, "I feel like we're gonna have a lot of things to discuss, but probably not in a police station. Meet at the Quarry tomorrow?"

"If we're not thrown in jail." Richie said.

They all nodded at each other, and then they fell silent, waiting for the Officer to return.

3. The Party takes the Most Stressful Road Trip

CHAPTER THREE

The Party takes the Most Stressful Road Trip

El had hoped to have a road trip at some point. See the world, take a look at everything she'd missed in the first twelve years of her life.

She just didn't expect it would happen like *this*.

Wasn't worth it, honestly.

Not only had her boyfriend been abducted, he'd been abducted by the *very people* who'd held her prisoner for her entire childhood. She knew *exactly* what they were doing to him, and she knew they wouldn't have any mercy for him. What especially worried her was Mike himself- he would *not* do anything they said, no matter what they did to him. Which would mean that they'd treat him *badly*, even worse than they'd treated El, who tried to do everything they asked.

El had nightmares about the Lab, even four years after her escape. Nightmares that she was back there, that she had never escaped, that she'd been dragged back, that her *friends* had been dragged back. But even in the latter, she'd been there with them. She could be with them. Mike was *alone*.

Mike was *alone*, and she *had* to find him.

"Hey, Jane? Are you awake?"

El sat up on the bed, glancing towards Kali. Kali looked around the room, from Max, who was asleep on the floor, to Nancy, who was asleep on the cot. Kali had been sleeping on the couch- or maybe not sleeping, maybe she was just sitting awake and thinking like El had been.

As it had turned out, Maine was about eighteen hours away from Indiana. There wasn't quite enough room for everyone to sleep in the

vans, so they'd stopped at a hotel for the night, intending to sleep for only a few hours before it was light again and they could start out. The boys were in the room across from them, but even there, El was a little anxious; she didn't like being split up from her friends so soon after Mike's capture.

"Yeah." El said, sitting up and turning to her sister. "Are you alright?"

Kali shook her head, and moved to sit by her sister. She didn't need to say what was worrying her; El knew it was the same thing that was keeping her awake that night. They were about to face their *Lab*. They were about to go in and fight them to free their friend.

"How's your gang?" El asked quietly.

"Texted them. Told them I'd be back soon. Hopper might be able to help them, but we're not sure. We've done a lot of shit."

El nodded. Slowly, she glanced at Nancy, who was sleeping, but only barely. She had only barely drifting off, probably just as worried as El. Finally, she said, "What are we going to do about her?"

"I don't know." Kali said. "I think she was right."

Of course she did. "I don't. She hurt people."

"I've hurt people."

"People who've deserved it."

"That's what she was trying to do."

They both sighed and glanced away from each other. They'd argue about this for a while, they knew, but they didn't quite feel like fighting right now.

"Do you think Will's as scared as we are?" El finally asked. "He wasn't there as long as us."

"Maybe that's worse." Kali said quietly, curling up a little. "He only knows the bare minimum of what they could do to him, maybe he's

imagining worse things.”

“I can’t think of any worse things.” El felt the tears start to come.

Kali nodded in agreement, and then the two of them hugged, crying silently in the middle of the night.

“We’re going to save him, right?” El asked.

“Of course.” her sister assured her. “Of course. We’ll find him. And nothing will stop us.”

“Everybody packed up?” Nancy said, waiting inbetween the two vans. Everyone nodded. “Okay, who’s going where?”

“I’m with Kal.” El said quickly.

“I’ll go with Lucas.” Max said, grabbing onto her boyfriend’s hand.

“I’ll go with Will this time.” Dustin said, shrugging. “I didn’t quite enjoy Lucas and Max’s couple playlist.”

“Bite me.” Max flipped him off. El couldn’t quite understand how they could *joke* at a time like this.

“Kay, we’ll put Will and Dustin with El and Kali.” Nancy said. “Chaperones?”

“I’ll take Nancy’s van this time.” Kali volunteered. “So long as Steve and Jonathan keep their eyes on the road.”

“Please,” Dustin rolled his eyes, “As if Nancy and Jonathan could keep their eyes off of-”

“Please shut up.” Jonathan groaned.

Will looked a little upset- he’d probably hoped to be with his brother this time. Still, now wasn’t the time to argue about organization, and everyone started piling into vans.

“Alright. We’ve got about ten more hours to go.” Nancy said. “Any

new ideas from yesterday?”

They'd spent the first four hours while driving on a speaker phone with the other van, discussing plans for getting into the Lab- however, most of them boiled down to “get the other kids- one of whom looks like Mike- and burn the shit out of everyone until we get our friend back.”

Everyone shook their heads at Nancy, and she sighed. “Alright, who's got music, then?”

“I'll do it!” Will volunteered.

“Uh...” Nancy began, looking a little worried.

“I vote ‘yes’!” Kali cheered; she loved her friend’s music taste. As Will passed his phone so Kali, who was sitting shotgun, could plug it in, El glanced towards Dustin. “You have extra earbuds?” she asked. Dustin handed some over.

By the time Will started his playlist- which began with some Metallica, of course- El had started her own music. Of course, it was a playlist of songs Mike really loved.

She had to stay focused. Focused on finding and helping him.

So she leaned against the window, and tried not to cry.

“Welcome to Derry.” Nancy read, as their van passed the sign.

Everyone sat up; it was mid-afternoon, and they'd finally passed into the town.

“Did the boy reply and say where they are?” Nancy asked into the speakerphone; they'd paused Will’s heavy metal a half hour ago to call the others.

“Yes.” Max said from the backseat. “He emailed me yesterday. Says there’s an abandoned house just outside of town. Let us go in first, I can give directions and you can follow our van.”

“Sounds good.” Nancy said, and after she hung up and allowed Steve and Jonathan’s van to pass by, she asked, “Are you all ready?”

“Of course.” El said, ready to burst.

“Okay, so here’s what I think we should do.” Nancy said. “We don’t want to send everyone in at once, in case these kids were intercepted.”

“I’ll go in.” El volunteered quickly.

Nancy sighed. “Of course.”

“And I’ll go.” Will added, picking up his bag of items from the floor. “I think Lucas’ll want to go, too.”

“How many did that Other Mike say there were still at the hideout?” Dustin asked.

“About four.” Kali said.

“So we’ll send one more in.” Nancy added.

“I’ll go. They need an adult.” Kali said.

“I want to go!” Dustin said.

“You and Max will be the backup.” Nancy said. “With me. I’ll burn down that fucking house if there’s anything in there that’ll hurt you.”

“But if Lucas wants to stay out,” El said to her friend, “You can go in with us, Dust.”

“And if they’re helpful?” Kali added, turning to Nancy. “What then?”

“Then we have our allies.” Nancy said.

“Alright. These kids are on the run and scared.” Kali said quietly to Lucas, El and Will as they stood outside the door. “So they’ll be very jumpy. We need to walk in there quietly, explain ourselves clearly, and make sure they know who we are. If they attack, don’t

immediately call foul: try to calm them down before calling Nancy in.”

“Has this happened to you before?” Will asked.

“I can just... understand their situation.” Kali said. “But we need to go in carefully, alright?”

They nodded, and she moved to the door, attempting to knock. Instead the door opened the second her fist hit it.

“Huh. Lock’s broken.” she said, before ushering the kids in. El glanced back once to see everyone else waiting by the vans, watching, before she shut the door behind them.

The house was dark, but not as broken as she feared it would be. It looked like someone had been living there, true, but someone who wasn’t able to manage the upkeep; broken floorboards and peeling paint showed *that* quite clearly. Still, the furniture looked nice, and there was a broom in the corner, probably responsible for keeping the dust out.

“Nice place.” Kali said. “Much better than what I’ve had to sleep in.”

“Why was this built in the middle of the woods?” Will asked, inspecting an empty picture frame.

“Someone was probably trying to live the *Little House on the Prairie* life but didn’t go all the way.” Lucas shrugged.

El, meanwhile, moved over to the next room, only briefly scanning the table and chairs before moving on. Where were they? Shouldn’t they be expecting them-

She heard a sound from above her, and she froze.

They were upstairs.

Where were the stairs?

She moved into the next room, and spotted the staircase. She rushed up, moving down the hall before finding a door that sounded right.

Without thinking, she threw it open, staring ahead.

A large room was ahead, big enough to be a living room. El walked in, managing to catch sight of a boy in the corner, before she felt the wind knocked out of her, and she dropped to the floor.

Fuck.

She opened her mouth, trying to let out a shout, but nothing came out. She couldn't move, either- she felt like her knees were nailed to the floor, leaving her crouched on the ground. Something was holding her there, refusing to let her move. She couldn't *move!* She was completely stuck.

"Don't fucking move." said a girl's voice from behind her.

Shit. Shit. Shit!

"I'll let you go, but you have to tell us who you are."

As if I wouldn't do it otherwise!

"And if you try to hurt us, I will kill you. I could do it, too."

And suddenly, El had the power to speak again.

Unfortunately, what came out wasn't words. It was a long shriek. It hadn't been El's choice; whatever the girl had done to her body to hold her in place, it felt so unnatural, so *cold* and *wrong*, that she couldn't do anything else.

"Fuck!" the girl yelled, as El heard her friends yell on the floor below.

"Shit, Bev, you didn't need to do that!" came another voice, and a boy rushed in, looking concerned; El could see him out of the corner of her eye.

"She surprised me." the girl behind her said.

"B-B-Bev..." the boy in the corner struggled to stand, and the other boy rushed to help him. "Wh-what if sh-she's our-"

Before he could finish that, El could see Lucas leap into the room, throwing out his arms, and energy burst from his hands. Suddenly, El could move again; as she jumped up, she heard the girl yell and fall to the ground. She immediately whipped around, throwing out her arms so the girl was lifted into the air and thrown into the wall.

“*Bev!*” the first boy called, and suddenly he shot something at El, something which she recognized quickly as ice- she’d seen Will toss ice enough times to know what it looked like. While she ducked out of the way, Will rushed forwards, his own skin white as a sheet, as he redirected the ice and shot it back.

Kali rushed forwards, grabbing onto El’s arm as the other girl- Bev- got to her feet. Bev gave her a dark glare, before throwing out her arms, and what looked like a dark cloud burst towards them. El and Kali managed to dodge, and El threw out another psychic blast, accompanied by a scream.

Bev suddenly jumped forwards, pointing her hand at Will, who was still fighting with the Ice Kid- the other boy was simply staring at everything, shocked, as he clutched his leg.

And as Bev pointed at Will, he froze.

“*Will!*” Lucas screamed, as Will was suddenly lifted into the air. He looked *horrorified*, staring down at his body as the white color drained out, not believing what was going on.

“Let him go!” El screamed, preparing to throw the girl again.

Suddenly, the door to the room flung open again, and El whipped around to see...

Oh, holy shit.

A boy stood in the doorway, staring ahead at the fight.

And, well, *wow*.

He really *did* look just like Mike.

4. Everyone has a bit of a Rocky Start

Notes for the Chapter:

Quick reminder, in case you missed it at the end of Part II: For chapters with a Party Member POV, Mike Hanlon will be referred to by his last name, and Mike Wheeler will be Mike; for chapters with Losers POV, it'll be vice versa.

Thanks for your lovely comments. :D

CHAPTER FOUR

Everyone has a bit of a Rocky Start

The kid- he said his name was Richie?- burst in, took one look at the crowd, and said, “Jesus fuck, guys, these are our reinforcements!”

Will dropped to the ground.

“Are you s-sure?” said the boy in the corner, stumbling over his words. “They d-d-don’t look like-”

“Know any other powered kids who’d like to find us?” Richie said, crossing his arms.

“Well, she burst in while I was helping Bill.” Bev said quickly, brushing her hands on her jeans. “I thought she was an intruder. Then they attacked-”

“Because we heard my sister screaming in pain.” Kali said, giving the girl a dark look.

“That’s no way to treat friends, Beverly Darling.” Richie said, moving forwards as his voice slipped into a mock British accent. He patted El on the back, saying, “Sorry, love.”

As he did, El heard voices downstairs- the others calling for them.

They must have heard the fight. “Up here!” she heard Lucas yell, moving out a little to direct them. “We’re okay, now!”

Still, they rushed up, with Max in the lead. She grabbed Lucas’s arm as the rest of them filtered in.

“Well, fuck me!” Richie said, as the Ice-Boy helped Bill over to the middle of the room, and Bev moved back towards them warily. “There’s a lot of you!” His eyes drifted to Nancy, staying there for a second, before he asked, “Are you the leader?”

“We haven’t got a-” Will began.

Nancy eyed the kid, and then burst. “Why do you look like Mike?”

There was a long, awkward pause. Richie turned to look at the ice-boy confusedly, before turning around. “Uh... I don’t think... really?”

“We’re talking about Nancy’s brother.” El said. She reached into her pocket, lifting out her phone. She opened it, showing Richie the lockscreen as she passed him the phone, which was her and Mike, from the last time they went to the movies, taking a picture with the poster. Richie stared at it, wide-eyed, as she continued. “My boyfriend. Mike Wheeler.”

Richie paused, then shrugged, smiling, handing the phone back to her. “Don’t see the resemblance, really.”

Bev grabbed the phone from El, staring. “Holy shit, Richie, she’s right.”

“He l-l-looks j-just like you.” the stuttering boy said quietly.

El grabbed the phone back, and Richie said, “Well, can’t say I can answer your question. But everyone’s got a double somewhere, right?”

Nancy glared at him, still suspicious, as Will said, “We’re actually here for... well, you guys, obviously, but... the Lab also has Mike.”

The kids stared, and then Nancy said, “Can we talk somewhere else?”

"Dining Room's big enough for all of us." the Ice-Boy said. "We can show you."

"So," Richie said, "You all know me. I'm Richard Tozier, the amazing."

The group sat at the Dining Table, with Nancy and El positioned closest to the four Derry children. El kept glancing sidelong at Bev, who was playing with a strand of her short hair.

"What's your power?" Kali asked.

"Ooh, it's pretty sick." Richie winked. "Lemme tell you the others first, though. This is *our* Mike. Mike Hanlon." he clapped Ice-Boy on the back, as he waved awkwardly. "He's a cryokinetic, which means he cries a lot."

"It means I control ice." The Other Mike said softly, holding out his hands so snowflakes burst out. "And snow. Doesn't work if I'm too hot though..." he trailed off, staring down at the table with a distant look in his eyes.

"This is Big Bill." Richie gestured to the stuttering boy. "He's our leader, really, but he's in a bit of a bad place right now. Your Lab really fucked up his leg- don't say shit, Bill, it's their fault. And that's Bev. She's the sweetheart."

"He's lying. I'm the muscle." Bev said. "These boys couldn't lift a fucking branch off the ground."

"They've got fairly similar powers." Richie said. "See... show em off, actually."

Bev sighed, and her and Bill held out their hands. Two clouds emerged- Bev's being black like before, but Bill's was a light yellow.

"Bev and Bill both control energies- negative and positive, respectively." Richie explained. "Bill uses happy memories to create positive energy as a weapon, while Bev uses sad memories."

“Which is pretty damn easy.” Bev shrugged.

“It c-c-comes with ex-extra quirks.” Bill added. “I c-c-can also s-s-sometimes control water. B-B-B-”

“I can also control blood.” Bev said darkly. She looked to Will and El pointedly. “Including the blood inside a body. I can bend it to my will. Pretty useful in a fight.”

“Uh... if you say so.” Nancy said, before turning back to Richie, still looking very suspicious. “And you?”

Richie considered. “Tell me yours first.”

“Are you hiding something?” Kali asked, giving him a dark glare.

“No. I just wanna see which of you have the coolest.” Richie shrugged.

As they all glanced at each other, Bill said, “If we’re g-g-going to be allies, we sh-sh-should know our st-strengths.”

Nancy finally held out her hand, letting flames flicker across her palm. Mikey jumped, startled, while Bev and Bill simply stared. Dustin held out his hand, too, letting a streak of electricity burst forth.

“Fire and Lightning.” Bev said, smiling a little. “Sweet. Names?”

“Nancy Wheeler.” Nancy said, glancing away from the kids and towards Dustin. “The teens are really the superheroes, though.”

“I’m Dustin.” Dustin introduced himself.

El then held out her hand, letting the sugar bowl on the counter fly to her. “El. Telekinesis.” she said simply.

Kali blinked, and suddenly butterflies burst from the sugar bowl, rushing for the others. Bev leapt up, shielding Bill with her arm, only for the bugs to pass right through her. As she turned, shocked, Kali said, “Kali, her sister. I create Illusions.”

Lucas shot a blast of energy into the air. “Lucas. Energy Manipulation.”

“Ben does something similar.” Bev said. “He can’t really fight with it, but he can manipulate a person’s energy levels. Make them more tired, awaken possible powers...”

“I can’t do that, but that sounds cool.” Lucas said. “I’d love to make my sister fall asleep.”

“I’m Max.” Max interrupted, and then, a half-second later, she was on top of the other side of the table, sitting in front of Richie, a red blur connecting the two points. “Super speed.”

“Ooooh, I fucking wish I had that.” Richie said, as Max rushed back.

The Derry Children turned expectedly towards Steve and Jonathan. Steve finally said, “Mine’s kinda dangerous to do indoors.”

“Tornado Boy?” Bev guessed.

Steve shook his head. “Gravity. I can manipulate the gravity around certain areas.”

“And I left my photos in the van,” Jonathan said, “But I can pull items out of photographs, so long as they’re not living.”

“And I,” Will said, “Can summon powers from colors.”

They blinked at him, and he reached forwards, gripping the table. His skin turned as gray, and he held out his hand, letting all the metal silverware burst out of a drawer, floating around him. “Gray’s metal.” he said. “Red’s fire, blue’s water, stuff like that.”

Bev suddenly dropped her stiff look, her eyes widening. “That’s *amazing!*” she said, fascinated. “It’s like every power at once!”

Will smiled a little. “I mean, it’s nothing...”

“So,” Nancy interrupted, turning to Richie. “What *can* you do?”

Richie sighed. “God, you all have such good powers. I need a

volunteer.”

“Will it hurt?” Dustin asked.

“Thanks for volunteering!” Richie said, leaping up and rushing towards him. Before Dustin could react, Richie tapped his shoulder. The second he made contact, his eyes flashed gold. He then held out his hand, letting electricity spark.

“Holy *shit!*” Richie cheered, eyes wide. “That feels *awesome!* Might wanna keep this!”

“What the...” Dustin paused, letting his own electricity spark for a second to make sure nothing had actually happened to his powers.

“While Will may have whatever power he chooses,” Richie said, letting sparks spread up his arm. “I have to work with the person I’m around. I’ve got Power Mimicry.”

“Yeah, and he’s stolen my ice more times than I can count.” Hanlon said, rolling his eyes good-naturedly.

“It’s not my fault it’s a *cool* power!”

“So,” Lucas asked carefully, interrupting them, “How’d you find out you had powers?”

They all fell silent, staring at each other. Finally, Bill said, “It’s a l-l-l-long story.”

“Basically, we were all fighting a big bully, and Ben accidentally woke our powers with his energy manipulation.” Hanlon said. “Then there was another long story- Another bully tried to kill us so we had to frame him for Bev’s Dad’s death, fun stuff like that- and Bev almost moved to Portland.”

“But when I got there, weird things started happening.” Bev said. “I started... forgetting Derry. Like, these guys are my best friends in the world, and I woke up one morning and it took me five hours to remember their *names*. So I freaked out and got on the first bus back here.” She sighed. “It wasn’t my first choice. I never wanted to come back to this shithole of a town. But, the idea of forgetting my boys...”

“So, wait, do you *live here?*” Dustin asked, looking around the house. “In *this house?*”

“Bev and Eddie do.” Richie explained. “Bill and I might as well, we’re here all the time. Stan, Mike and Ben have the misfortune to have *lives*, otherwise we could make this a living quarters.”

“It’s kind of our headquarters. We’ve had it since we found it.” Hanlon said. “Before then, we hid Bev in the underground clubhouse for two months.”

“It got cold.” Bev shrugged.

“And we practice our powers here, just us Losers.” Richie said. “We sometimes sneak around town to fight things, but... well, the adults don’t really give a shit about kids, so we try not to get in too much trouble, they won’t hesitate to beat the shit outta us.”

“Losers?” El asked.

“We’re the Losers Club.” Hanlon explained. “Or, well... four-sevenths of it. As we, uh, mentioned, Stan, Eddie and Ben are out of commission currently.”

“What do Stan and Eddie do?” Steve asked.

They glanced at each other, as if wondering if they should tell them. Finally, Bill said, “St-Stan can turn into a b-b-bird. S-sometimes he c-c-can only change part of himself; like grow w-w-wings out of his b-b-back or talons out of his f-fingers.”

“I tried stealing that once.” Richie explained. “Growing wings *hurts like hell*, I’m impressed he does it as often as he does.”

“And Eddie... it’s c-c-complicated.” Bill said, and he glanced to Mike Hanlon.

“Eddie has Invulnerability, for starters.” Hanlon said. “He also has minor healing powers, but *very* minor. He can heal cuts and bruises, and occasionally wounds, but what happens is the pain transfers to *him*. Of course it heals itself, because he’s invulnerable, but it still hurts him for that short time.”

"So the Lab has an Energy Manipulator, a Bird-Man, and a Healer." Max counted.

The Losers all flinched. "W-w-well," Bill said, narrowing his eyes, "Wh-what about y-y-your Mike? What does h-h-he do?"

El spoke up first. "He protects us." They stared at her for more information, and she said, "Shields. Forcefields. Sometimes light beams."

"We might be in trouble, then." Hanlon said.

"If he's your sh-sh-shield," Bill said, "Your g-g-guard might be d-down during fights. You'll ex-expect him to be there."

"We won't have our *guard down*." Lucas said, looking offended.

"If his power's Defense," Bev asked quietly, "How'd he get captured?" They all fell silent, staring at her. After a second, she said, "Our friends got caught because we fucked up."

The Losers all looked down at the table as Bev continued. "The Lab showed up a few weeks ago. They saw us, doing our powers at the Quarry. We only barely got away ourselves, and by the time we realized half of us were gone..."

"W-w-we decided it'd be b-b-better to not b-be around town." Bill finished. "We've only got food left for a few more days."

They were quiet for a moment, and then Nancy said, "It's my fault."

"What?" Bev asked, looking up.

"It's my fault that Mike got captured." Nancy said, gripping the table until her knuckles turned white. "We- me, Jonathan and Steve- were going around destroying buildings built by the Lab, buildings they were using as covers or moneymakers. I was taking care of one in our hometown, and I decided not to tell the kids because I thought... I thought we could handle it, that we could be in and out before the kids even noticed, but there were more bases than I thought, and Mike went after me and because I didn't tell him until it was too late... the Lab showed up and they got him. And it's my fucking

fault..."

She trailed off, staring at the table.

Finally, Richie spoke. "What experience do you have with this Lab?"

Everyone, probably involuntarily, turned to look at El and Kali. The two sisters looked at each other, pain behind both of their eyes. Finally, Kali said, "It's complicated. Long story short, Nancy helped us burn down their Hawkins Base four years ago, and apparently they set up here."

"Have any of you been in there?" Richie asked.

They all glanced to each other again. Will spoke before anyone else could. "I have. But I was in the vents for most of it."

"Why-"

"You guys must have had a long drive." Hanlon interrupted, looking to all of them. "Why don't we set you up in some empty rooms, and we can plan later?"

"But-" Richie started, but Nancy stood up quickly.

"Good idea." she said, sending the other Mike a thankful look. "Let's go."

5. The boys think of Mike as "The Other Richie"

Notes for the Chapter:

So sorry this was late! Had an accidental change of plans lol. The next chapter should be early tomorrow, too.

CHAPTER FIVE

The boys think of Mike as “The Other Richie”

“When the fuck are they coming back?”

It had been forever since the kid had been brought in. The boys had heard someone coming and retreated back to the original room, hesitantly leaving Richie's Doppelganger behind, and were currently sitting against the wall. People went in-and-out of the boy's room all day, probably re-applying the drugs.

“If they're not careful,” Ben muttered, glancing towards the connecting door again, “They'll give him an overdose.”

“I meant for us.” Stan said, his voice shaking slightly. “They're definitely gonna drag us back out, right? They wouldn't just... do that shit and then leave us to die?”

“I say, if we don't get food in two days, we break out and start killing people.” Eddie said.

“I might still be able to shift my talons in.” Stan said quietly, looking down at his hands. “But I don't know. When I tried with my wings, it hurt a hell of a lot worse than usual. And my talons haven't worked since I sliced up that guard a few days ago- I think they did something to me.”

“Then we'll try that as a last resort.” Ben said.

They were silent for another minute, and then Eddie said, “We should

check on the Other Richie again. Maybe they did something to him.”

“Are you sure you can’t wake him up?” Stan asked Ben, as they all stood up.

“I can read and control energy, not suck out drugs.”

Eddie paused at the door, an idea suddenly coming to him. He paused, before turning to the other boys, his voice lowering as much as he dared. “Maybe... maybe I could?”

“What?” they asked.

“I can cure wounds. Maybe if I try touching him, I could...”

“You can’t absorb drugs, Eddie,” Ben said, “We’ve tested sickness and other internal problems before, remember? But that’s a nice thought.”

“We could *try*.”

“Eddie, we don’t want them to find out... about the healing. They know about the invulnerability, we don’t want to give them more information.” Stan whispered, glancing towards the corner where a camera was positioned, hoping he was quiet enough that the microphone wouldn’t pick him up- if there was a microphone; he didn’t really know. But he *assumed*, because what self-respecting evil Lab wouldn’t have microphones on their cameras?

Eddie sighed, but nodded. The less information the Lab had on them, the better.

Still, they pushed through the door, moving back in towards the boy, who looked to be asleep, lying on one of those hard beds the Lab had in each room the boys had been staying in before they’d been tossed into one; the room they were in now only had one bed, and the boys had decided to all sleep on the floor instead. They approached the Other Richie now, stopping just a few inches away.

“It’s uncanny.” Eddie said, and they all knew what he meant.

“If he’s a shapeshifter, though,” Ben finally said, “Then how can he hold a disguise if he’s drugged?”

"I mean, we've never met a shapeshifter," Stan said quietly, leaning down, "Maybe they can stay disguised for days."

"But we know it's hard for us to use our powers without draining our energy." Eddie said. "I can't imagine him being able to shapeshift himself without being tired as hell."

"Maybe he's not even drugged," Stan suggested, "Maybe he's just tired from holding a disguise?"

"No," Ben said, moving forwards to touch his hand, reading the energy coursing through his body, "He's definitely drugged."

"Why would they keep him drugged, though?" Eddie asked. "Could he really be that dangerous?"

"Maybe if he shapeshifted into a guard, he could get out." Stan said.

"Dude, we're just assuming that he's a shapeshifter." Ben said. "Maybe he just looks a hell of a lot like Richie."

"And he just happened to be in the same evil Lab as us?" Stan asked.

"It's possible."

"But not *probable*."

"I wonder what drugs they're giving him." Eddie said, looking the kid in the face, staring confusedly at the boy who looked just like his fellow Loser.

"Does it matter? So long as he's unresponsive." Stan said.

"It might." Eddie hesitantly said.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well..." Eddie sighed, before lowering his voice to a barely audible whisper. "You know that I know my way around medicine pretty well."

Stan and Ben nodded. Eddie's obsession with health had carried even

past what Richie had lovingly dubbed the ‘Great Gazebo Incident’ of three years before.

“If I could find their drug supply,” he said, even softer, “I may be able to find a decent placebo. It may not work for long, but maybe for long enough to wake him up.”

“How would you get to their drug supply?” Stan asked.

Eddie considered. “We could wait for someone to come by the give the kid his drugs. Then we have Ben knock him out and run.”

Stan looked horrified. “*What?*”

“Stan, quiet, there might be-”

“Eddie, we can’t fight them. You know that.” Stan said quickly. “Remember the first time we tried to escape? Remember what they *did* to us? They-”

“Wait...” Ben said quietly. “Wait, hold on. Eddie might be onto the right idea.”

“You’re with him?” Stan asked.

Ben hesitated. “We might not be able to find their drug supply. I doubt we’d get very far if we tried to explore the building, especially if we didn’t know where we were going. But... I could knock out the guard who comes to drug up the kid.”

“They apply those drugs every three hours.” Stan said, having checked throughout the last day. “We can’t hold off guards for three hours.”

“Maybe they apply drugs every three hours cause it takes, like, four hours to wear off?” Ben suggested. “Then we’d only have hold them off for *one* hour.”

“Yeah, and then they beat the shit out of us and drug the kid again after we get two words in edgewise.” Stan said. “Great plan.”

“Maybe the kid could escape while we cause a distraction.” Ben said.

"If they're keeping him drugged up, he must be dangerous. He could get out and get help."

They were silent for a minute, staring at the sleeping boy. Then, Eddie said, "There's one thing I still don't get. Why would they put us right next to him? They must have figured out we'd go talk to him. And they've got cameras, so they *know* we know he's here."

"Maybe they're trying to bait us into escaping?" Stan suggested. "So we *definitely* shouldn't piss them off?"

Ben got an idea, then, and he whispered, "Shit."

"What?" Eddie and Stan both turned, looking concerned.

Ben didn't dare look them in the face; instead, he focused on the sleeping boy. "I just realized why. This kid... this kid's a warning."

As the others fell silent, he continued. "Maybe they know we know a kid who looks like him, maybe we don't. But we know he's powered, he's an experiment like us. It's a warning that if we try to fight back, we'll get something worse than an electrocution or a kick to the shins."

"Are you saying," Eddie asked, his voice dropping so low Ben almost missed his question, "That they're threatening to do... to do *this* to us?"

Ben nodded, and all the boys fell silent.

"Well, shit." Stan finally said.

Before they could say anything else, they heard more footsteps.

"What the fuck?" Stan said, turning in confusion. "They were just here for the kid."

"Does he need more drugs?" Eddie asked.

Ben grabbed the other boys' arms, dragging them back to their room. "You *idiots*," he said, "They're here for *us*!"

Before they could say any more, the door opened behind them, and the boys froze, realizing that they were still in the middle of the Other Richie's room.

"Shit, shit, shit," Stan said, as he moved to push the other two behind him, staring down the guards who entered- why did so many had to come in? Stan counted four but there might have been more outside the room.

The guards watched them for a minute, as Stan glared at them, saying, "Sorry, we'll go."

"We're taking you back to individual testing." one Guard said.

Instantly, Ben let out a gasp, and Eddie yelled, "Wh-what? No!"

Stan was in such a state of shock, he didn't notice that a guard had grabbed him and dragged him away from the others until it was too late. He started yelling then, saying, "Wait, no! Eddie! Ben!"

"Stan!"

"Stan!"

Stan sat in the corner of the room, curled up and trying not to cry. If he cried, they'd know that they got to him.

Ben and Eddie must have been separated, too, and now they were all alone again. Now that they'd all gotten the message from the Other Richie, he doubted they'd let them all together again. It wouldn't be a good idea to have all the prisoners alone together for long enough to formulate a plan for escape after all. And, well, before they'd been captured, Richie had been ranting about some Lab he'd read about that tried to attention-starve their prisoners so they'd become reliant on the Doctors. Well, if that's what they were trying...

The door opened, and Stan had to stand up to see the man who'd entered; there was a table right in front of him, and it was hard to see over it. He took a long look at the man, before saying, "What did you do to the others?"

The man stared at him blankly, probably analyzing his response, before saying, “They’ll be alright. They’re undergoing more testing.”

Fuck. Eddie and Ben had told him what testing was like. That wasn’t good.

“As will you.” the man said. “The drugs that keep your talons held back will wear off in about a minute, and then we’d like you to do some things with them. We have some tests prepared.”

Drugs? He hadn’t been drugged, he didn’t think. Then again, the food he’d been given had tasted weird; maybe he’d been right to wait a few days before daring to eat it.

“Of course, your wings won’t come back for a while. We’ve made sure of that. Can’t have you flying away, can we?”

They *did* do something to his wings. Stan clenched his fists together, wishing he could just run up and punch that man in his stupid face, or maybe slice him through with his talons.

“And, should you use your talons on us again, we’ll have no choice but to reapply the drug.”

And it wasn’t as if Stan could stop them. He’d die if he starved himself, and if they didn’t care about him dying, that wouldn’t be much of a punishment to them. It would be a punishment for Eddie and Ben, and he didn’t want that. And if they *did* care about him dying, they’d find some other way to drug him.

So, right now, he’d have to play along.

Stan stared at him for a second, and before he could stop himself, he said, “So, you’re testing powers here?”

The man raised an eyebrow. “That’s right.”

“Then what about the drugged-up kid? How are you testing that?”

The man stared at him for so long, Stan wondered if he had frozen. But, no, he didn’t seem shocked. Just seemed like he was thinking of how much he could tell him.

Finally, the man said, “We weren’t testing him. But we will begin soon.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“The drugs we were placing him under were in order to prevent one of his allies’ powers from tracking him. We’ve had a recent change of plans.”

Allies?

Stan stared hard, wondering if he could get away with telling the guy to fuck off, and the man then placed several objects on the table. “Now,” he said, an odd smile on his face, “As soon as your talons come in, I want you to shred these.”

6. A Fun and Totally Normal Sleepover Party

Notes for the Chapter:

Posted early because I, too, am going to a fun and totally normal party.

I feel like y'all are going to flip out, though. XD

CHAPTER SIX

A Fun and Totally Normal Sleepover Party

“We’ve all been sleeping in Bill’s room, to make sure his leg’ll be okay.” Mike Hanlon explained, as the large group headed up the stairs. “So you can take as many rooms as you want; there are still some beds left over from when the original owners were here. Just don’t go in the attic.”

“Why not?” Max asked.

“It’s where we keep our porn.” Richie said.

“It is *not!*” Hanlon yelled, as Bev play-slapped Richie upside the head. He didn’t seem bothered; in fact, he burst into laughter.

“It’s where E-E-Eddie sleeps.” Bill informed the others as they reached the top of the stairs; Hanlon was helping him walk, his leg still looked really stiff. “We d-d-don’t want to t-t-touch his st-stuff.”

The Party all sadly nodded, already understanding.

“We should only take two rooms, like at the hotel.” Nancy said, turning back towards the Party. “Girls and Boys. We left our sleeping bags in the van, can someone grab those?”

“I can.” Kali offered.

“I’ll go, too.” Dustin said.

“There’s a lot of sleeping bags,” Steve said. “I can go with Dustin for the boys’.”

“I’ll go with Kali, too.” Max offered. “Actually, I could just *run* and grab them all now.”

“Try to save your powers for when you actually need them.” Jonathan suggested.

“We need them *now*.” Max groaned.

“We don’t even need sleep right now, it’s mid-afternoon.” Jonathan shrugged.

“Still, we should set up so we can spend some time planning our move.” Will said. “We want to get Mike out of that Lab as fast as possible.”

“It still may take a few days.” Mike Hanlon said. “That Lab’s pretty... well, hard to get in.”

“Not with us.” El said.

The Losers glanced at each other, and then Bev said, “Mike makes Dinner at Seven. Girls’ Bathroom is the one on the far end of the hall, Boys’ is right by the stairs. If you need anything, we’ll either be in Bill’s room or somewhere downstairs.”

At that, the Losers left the Party.

After a second, Nancy said, “Alright, guys, let’s go get our stuff.”

The girls were busy setting up- putting their sleeping bags in the room, trying to maneuver around the furniture, all that jazz. El thought this room must have been a playroom once, as there were two trunks on either side, a nice rug that must have been colorful once, and paintings of fairies in the corners of the walls. Max opened a closet, and after investigating it, said, “It’s empty. We can probably put some stuff in here.”

"We could probably lock it and hide inside should someone break in." Kali said. "Has enough room to hide without suffocating us to death. I like it."

"You have the best compliments." Max rolled her eyes.

Nancy simply flopped onto her sleeping bag, pulling out her bag and laying out maps and spreadsheets that Hopper had smuggled them. As she and Kali started going over them, and Max ran off to see if Lucas need help, El slowly backed out of the room. She didn't quite feel like *talking* about the Lab right now, she just wanted to get in and get Mike out as fast as possible.

She slowly moved to push some hair out of her face, only to realize that her hairband had snapped, and her ponytail was slowly falling. She pulled a ribbon out of her pocket as she let out a low curse, thinking she might just duck into the bathroom and figure out a way to put it up and out of her face again.

Only, once she entered the bathroom, she froze in place, realizing that Bev was inside.

Bev jumped at the sound of the door opening, whipping around with one hand extended. She relaxed slightly when she saw El, who said, "S-sorry."

"No, I just... never had to lock the door before." Bev shrugged, turning back towards the mirror. "All my friends were boys, after all, didn't need to use the girls' room, and didn't think of coming in."

El paused, before glancing down and seeing that Bev had a pair of scissors in her hands. "What are you doing?"

"Cutting my hair." Bev shrugged.

"Wh-why?" El asked, suddenly shocked. "Why would you do that?"

She didn't mean to be rude, really. She didn't. But she'd spent so long growing out her hair- so long trying to undo the damage the Lab had done to her- that she'd screamed the first time someone suggested a haircut to her. She couldn't imagine doing it *herself*.

Bev paused, glancing awkwardly at her, before saying, “Can you close the door?”

El hesitated. She didn’t exactly trust this Bev girl- she didn’t quite like the fact she had the power to control her via her *blood*- but, well, she could probably overpower her if need be. She slowly kicked the door shut, as Bev reached up, feeling a strand of her hair.

“My, uh... my hair’s gotten too long.” Bev said, as El moved a little closer. She didn’t get what Bev was talking about; her hair only barely brushed her shoulders.

“I don’t get it.” El said bluntly.

Bev sighed, still flipping the scissors in her hand. “My, uh... my Dad liked my hair long. He... he *really* liked my hair long.”

There was something dark in her voice, something that made El realize exactly what she was saying without her having to elaborate.

Oh.

Oh, shit.

“I chopped it off first when I was thirteen.” Bev said quietly. “He didn’t like that, but it made me happy. And I found out that I liked it short. Easier to clean, looks pretty cute... and, well, when it gets too long, I think about... well, it’s time for a haircut, you know?”

El paused, before saying, “My... Papa liked it short.”

She hadn’t said her name for him in years. She said *him* if she had to refer to him, and she’d always called Hopper “Hop”, or “Dad” on occasion. She didn’t even like saying that man’s name. Even thinking about him just gave her an unsettled feeling in her stomach, a dark prickling in the back of her mind.

Whoever Bev’s Dad was, he seemed to do the same thing to her.

“Yeah?” Bev asked, something lighting in her eyes.

El nodded. “He... liked Kali’s short, too. She had it half-shaved for a

while, to keep the anger alive, but to still piss him off by growing part. So... well, we keep it as long as we can, now."

Bev gave her a very sympathetic look, and El realized that they both understood something about each other now. Something that, try as they might, the Losers and a good chunk of the Party wouldn't be able to get.

"Do you want help?" El asked. "Cutting it?"

Bev shook her head. "I've done this before." she said. "But... thanks."

El nodded, and Bev turned on the water faucet. She slowly raised the scissors to her hair, cutting off a stand and watching it fall down the drain.

"Is that going to clog?" El asked, as Bev started cutting more of her hair off.

"Hasn't yet." she said.

El watched for a bit, forgetting why she'd come into the bathroom in the first place, as Bev's hair washed down the drain. Finally, she turned the water off, placing the scissors back in a cabinet above the sink. She turned around, her short hair starting to fluff around her head. "What do you think?" she asked.

El paused, before smiling. "Bitchin'." she said.

Bev smirked. "I think I like that. Bitchin'."

After a minute, El said, "Hey... how much info *do* you have on the Lab?"

"Do you think they're actually in trouble?" Lucas asked, as Max leaned on his shoulder, staring up at the ceiling.

Steve nodded. "Yeah. Yeah, I don't see why they'd lie."

"You mean like someone who'd lie and say they weren't fighting

crime when they were?” Will asked, giving the teenagers pointed glares.

“Listen, it was just taking down parts of the Lab. We kinda just hoped after a few fires they’d get discouraged and give up, we didn’t see the need to worry you.” Jonathan said.

“Specifically you.” Steve said, gesturing to Will. “And El and Kal. You guys very clearly don’t like talking about the Lab.”

“That doesn’t mean you couldn’t warn us.” Will said, curling up a little on his sleeping bag.

They were quiet for a minute, and then Dustin said, “Do you think they were lying at all?”

“What do you mean?” Max asked, turning towards him.

“There’s no way they trust us.” Dustin said. “The girl especially, though I think the Other Mike likes us a lot.”

“You mean the Other Mike or Richie?” Max asked.

“It doesn’t *matter*.” Lucas rolled his eyes. “If they withheld information from us, it would only hurt them in the long run. They want their friends out of that Lab as much as we want Mike out.”

“What if their friends don’t exist?” Dustin asked. “What if they’re here to trap us for the Lab?”

“Don’t say *that!*” Will said, sounding horrified.

“Look, if they convinced the kids that they were doing good...” Dustin said, and Lucas could tell that he actually looked nervous. He didn’t want any of the rest of them captured, he knew.

“I think they were being honest.” Jonathan said after a second. “They seemed too sad talking about their friends to be lying.”

“We shouldn’t completely let our guard down.” Lucas said after a minute. “But I think we can trust them a little. They’re just scared kids like us.”

“I think they’re trustworthy.” Mike Hanlon said, as he waved his hand and let a shower of snowflakes fall to the ground.

“Me, too.” Bill said, looking up from the bed, where he’d curled up with his sketchbook. “They l-l-lost a fr-friend, too.”

“I’m not sure.” Richie said cautiously, staring up at the ceiling from the chair beside Bill’s bed. “I don’t think they’re connected to the Lab, but I’m not sure they quite know what they’re doing, either. Too impulsive. I mean, we planned for days before even *considering* storming the Lab. They just wanna break in right now. We’d get caught in a millisecond.”

“There are, like, forty of them, though.” Mike said. “They might be able to overpower the Lab through sheer numbers alone.”

“There aren’t *forty*,” Bill sighed, “There are n-n-nine.”

“Still more than we have.” Richie sighed.

Before anyone could say anything, Bev poked her head through the door. “Boys, meeting. Now.”

“What? We just got back up here.” Richie said. “I don’t wanna herd the Indiana Crew down.”

“It’s not for *them*, it’s just for us and El and Kali.” Bev said. “They have information.”

She spun around, rushing back out. Mike paused, before saying, “I can help Bill-”

“I got him.” Richie said. “You go ahead.”

Hanlon nodded at him, before rushing out.

As soon as he was gone, and Richie reached to help Bill stand up, Bill said, “Why didn’t we t-t-tell them abo-about the town?”

“Well, they won’t be going into town, will they, Billy-boy?” Richie

asked, smiling a little. “That’s on a need-to-know basis. They don’t need to know about that.”

“They might n-need to, if we need more s-supplies.”

“Then they won’t be there for long.”

“What about... about IT?”

Richie’s face fell slightly, but he still shrugged. “Won’t be a problem for another... twenty-four years. Need-to-know, Billy.”

“And... and what about y-your other power?”

Richie froze in place, his breath catching in his throat. Bill stopped, too, staring at him cautiously. Richie slowly turned, looking up at him in horror.

“You wouldn’t.” he finally said.

“Rich,” Bill said seriously. “They should know. If they’re... they should know.”

Richie stared at him, hard, something breaking in his expression. He took a long, deep breath, before saying, in a dark voice, “Bill... Bill, they can’t know. They *can’t* know.” He paused, taking a breath, before saying, “Bill, you know you’re my best friend. I love you.”

It was Bill’s turn to stare, as Richie continued, “But I will do *whatever* it takes to make sure they don’t find out. No one can know- not them, not the other Losers, no one. I will do *anything*. Do you understand?”

Bill narrowed his eyes, before saying, “They should know.”

“Do you understand?”

Bill nodded.

“Good. Let’s go.”

And they left the room without another word.

7. Mike Wheeler Raises Hell

Notes for the Chapter:

K so I know I already marked this fic with "Graphic Depictions of Violence", but I'm gonna go ahead and give you all a head's up- there's lots of shit going on in this chapter. Gonna give a trigger warning for: vomiting, references to knockout drugs, electrocution, and references to and depictions of heavy violence.

Also, your responses to the last chapter killed me. I love you guys so much.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mike Wheeler Raises Hell

Floating...

I'm floating...

I'm... not...

At first, everything was very blurry, and Mike's head hurt like hell. He blinked up at the ceiling, before shutting his eyes. Too bright. *Too bright.*

And then he remembered.

The fire.

Nancy.

The Lab.

THE LAB.

He sat up, letting out a yell as his head pounded. He was breathing hard, and as he took in the room around him, he felt his spirit sink.

Yeah. Yeah, this looked like the Lab.

Of course, he only had a few seconds to process this before he leaned over the bed and threw up.

Fuck. When had he eaten last? He felt *so* light-headed. He stumbled to his feet, almost tripping over himself as he rushed to the door, listening. Someone must be coming. As he put his ear to the door, he was suddenly aware that he wasn't wearing his clothes anymore—someone had changed him into a hospital gown, barely reaching past his knees. Anything in his pockets that might have helped him was *gone*. Shit, shit, did that mean the Lab had his phone? How much information could they get off of it?

He tried to think back. Had El or Will ever told him anything about the Lab? Will had said that he'd been locked in solitary—well, that seemed to be what was going on. El didn't like talking about it, but he managed to get a general image from stuff she'd let slip. He knew that the guards would come around when they needed him, and that there were enough people in the building to make a quick escape improbable. But if he could keep his shields up...

Before he could think of anything else, he felt another wave of nausea coming over him, and he quickly lowered to the ground, clutching his stomach and trying to stay still. He didn't want to puke again, not when he didn't know how long he'd been out and how long it'd been since he'd eaten. What he did know was that he had a *splitting* headache. He leaned against the wall, still listening. Now that he thought about it, Will had said there were cameras. If they knew he was awake, they'd definitely come for him.

Will hadn't been in the Lab long enough to know what they'd do to him, and El and Kali hadn't wanted to talk about it. But he did remember El breaking the Testing Room with a righteous fury, remembered Kali saying something about being thrown into Solitary for days on end, remembered El saying something about not wanting to be around cats because of an incident that had happened, tears in her eyes as she admitted it...

He couldn't stay here. He'd have to get out.

Suddenly, a dark thought crossed his mind, as he sat on the floor, still shaking and trying not to puke.

Nancy was with me.

Fuck, Nancy was with me.

If Nancy was in that building, he'd have to get her out. It didn't matter how dangerous it would be; he *couldn't* leave anyone there. And if Nancy had fire powers... well, his shield and her fire could probably get them out in ten seconds flat. Unless she was knocked out, too.

Then again, that all depended on whether or not she was there.

But she *had* to be there. She had to be. If she wasn't... well, that meant she'd left him. And she wouldn't do that... she *wouldn't*...

He finally heard footsteps moving down the hall. He braced himself, holding out his hand and seeing a flicker of light. His powers were still working, at least for now. But he should probably save them as much as he could, he didn't want to knock himself out.

Mike slowly stumbled to his feet, turning towards the door with a dark glare as it opened. A man in a suit stared back at him, and said, "We're going to need you."

Instead of responding, Mike threw out his hands, letting his strands of light toss the man backwards. As he flew, Mike swallowed back his fears, hoped to God he wouldn't throw up in the hall, and took off running.

He didn't make it far before the alarms sounded, making his awful headache somehow even worse. He started trying door handles, trying to find another room that might be holding Nancy. His room hadn't had a window on the door, so he tried all the doors that looked blocked. He kept knocking, yelling, "Anyone there?", and only waiting for a few seconds to see if there was an answer, before

running off. He didn't want to waste too much time, didn't want to stay in one place.

As Mike rushed down a corner, glancing from door to door, he stopped at one, freezing. He peered through the window, freezing upon seeing the glass wall beyond it. It was a Testing Room, the kind El had destroyed years before. He should go, he should go, he should go...

And then he saw someone move behind the glass wall, and all thoughts of leaving were completely gone.

He let his light beams slip into the lock and turn the mechanisms until the door swung open. Mike stumbled in, seeing two men in suits turn to stare at him. He only paused for a second before letting his light blast out, throwing them into the wall- but not the glass wall, he couldn't risk it breaking, not while he was so stressed out. Mike threw a forcefield around himself quickly, anticipating an attack, but the men seemed to be satisfactorily knocked out. He dropped the shield and ran for the door, unlocking it and rushing in.

"Who's here?" he asked, holding his hands out.

He turned, seeing a boy ducked under a table, covering his neck with his hands. Mike slowly moved forwards, crouching in front of him. "It's okay. It's okay, I'm-"

The boy suddenly shot his head up, almost hitting the table. "Richie!" he yelled, shocked. As he laid eyes on Mike, his face fell slightly. "Oh. You."

"My... my name's Mike?" Mike said, confused. "I'm busting out of here. Are you okay?"

"You're the Other Richie." the boy said, almost blankly.

"The... no. No, I'm Mike."

"Mike..." Eddie hesitated, before crawling out from under the table. "I'm Eddie Kaspbrak."

"We need to get out. Do you know if anyone else is here?" Mike said.

“Stan and Ben.” Eddie said. “I don’t know where they are-”

“It’s okay, we’ll find them.” Mike said, grabbing Eddie’s hand and trying to drag him out. “My sister might be here, too, we’ll-”

“I don’t think she is.” Eddie said.

Mike paused. “What?”

“You came in after us, you were in the room next to us while they kept you drugged out of your mind. If someone was with you, we didn’t see her.”

Mike stared at him, suddenly feeling his heart sinking.

“Are you okay?”

Before Mike could answer, he doubled over, feeling more nausea. He only barely held back from throwing up, but Eddie dropped next to him, grabbing his hands. “Are you okay?” he asked. “Maybe I can help, are you-”

“Sorry, just... feeling like shit.” Mike choked out.

“Makes sense. They kept you drugged for at least two days, probably more.”

“Shit.” Mike said. “Did they feed me at all?”

“Doubt it.”

Mike tried to stand up again, saying, “We have to start moving. They’ll know where we are and I don’t want to use my powers more than I have to, it’ll knock me out.”

“You mean Shapeshifting?”

“What?” Mike looked down at the kid as they tried to stumble out. “What? No. I make forcefields.”

It was Eddie’s turn to look stupefied. “What? Then why do you look like Richie?”

“Who the hell is Richie?” Mike asked.

Eddie stared at him, stunned, as they exited the room, stepping over the men who’d been watching him. “What the fuck...”

Mike glanced down at the men as they passed them, heading for the hall. “What were they doing to you?”

Eddie hesitated. “Um... t-testing my invulnerability.”

“How do you...”

“You don’t want to know. You’re just lucky you came in while they weren’t in the room.”

Mike flinched. “I won’t let them do that to you again. We’re gonna get the fuck out of here.”

“I’m not leaving without Stan and Ben.”

“We’re not.” Mike said. “We’ll find them and we’ll get out. Do you know where we are?”

They started going down the hall, as the alarms were still blaring in their ears; Mike felt like his head was going to burst.

“We’re in Derry, Maine.” Eddie said.

“They took me to *Maine*? ”

“Where were you?”

“Hawkins, Indiana.” Mike said. “They used to have a Lab there, but we destroyed it.”

“You *did*? ”

“Well, Nancy did.” Mike said. “I went in to get a friend out, and once he was safe...”

They heard a door open down a corner, and Mike instantly pushed Eddie behind him, throwing up his hands to summon a field around them. Eddie gasped as light encircled them.

“Stay back. They’ll shoot at us.” Mike said, though he wondered how long he could hold the field; he was already starting to feel drowsy. “Once they stop for a minute, I’ll try hitting them. Once they’re knocked out, we’ll run again.”

“You don’t need to shield me. I’m invulnerable.” Eddie said quietly.

“I’m *not*. Besides, we don’t know if they have anything in those bullets. They’re a Lab, they might have found your weakness.”

Eddie paused. “They did find Stan’s.”

Before Mike could ask what that meant, someone stepped into view.

Someone Mike didn’t expect to see.

In shock, he dropped the field. He couldn’t see Eddie pale behind him, but he heard the breath get knocked out of him. “Oh, fuck.” Eddie whispered.

Mike didn’t say anything for a second, instead feeling anger and hate and *fury* boil over into his glare.

He’d only seen the man once. But he remembered well enough who he was.

Brenner.

“You son of a *bitch!*” Mike found himself yelling, as he rushed forwards. He didn’t know what he was planning to do; he probably would have just decked the man in the face, or tackled him, before screaming at him some more. He usually wasn’t one for fistfights, but he could make an exception for the man who made El and Kali’s lives a living hell.

He’d almost reached him, his mind only starting to process that he seemed oddly calm for being charged at by a pissed-off powered teen, when he heard Eddie screech behind him.

Mike turned his head, just for a second, to see what was going on. It was only a second. But it was enough.

Because the second he turned around, he felt someone grab his arm, pulling him up. Something metallic jammed into his side, and then...

Oh, *fuck*.

Mike had only been electrocuted once, when Dustin accidentally zapped him. It'd been painful, sure, but not enough to warrant more than a few swear words, and it had worn off pretty quickly. Dustin had said something about how he'd been lucky he wasn't focusing; if he was focusing, he could cause serious damage. Will had looked very upset at that, glancing away as he told Mike that electrocution was serious business.

Now Mike understood what he'd meant.

He felt like his chest was caving in, like his arms were about to pull themselves from their sockets. His legs felt like lead, and he crumpled to the ground, a piercing shriek coming out of his lungs. He couldn't *breathe*. He couldn't *fucking breathe*. His head was going to explode, or his heart, *something* was going to burst and he wasn't sure what would blow first.

He was grabbed from behind and thrown into the wall, and that was when he threw up again. He heard Eddie scream something behind him, but he couldn't pay attention; his vision was swimming. He was moved, his arms both held tight so he couldn't run. He wondered drearily if he could kick his way free, but at this point, he was just glad that they'd moved him away from the small pool of vomit on the floor.

And then *he* kneeled down, looking Mike directly in the face.

"Nice to see that you're awake." Brenner said, and Mike instantly hated his voice.

"Fuck you." Mike spat as soon as he could find the words.

One of the men holding him twisted his arm, and Mike let out an involuntary cry. He heard Eddie call out, "Mike!" from the other end of the hall.

"You know him?" Brenner asked, turning. Mike glanced in that

direction, seeing that only one soldier was holding back Eddie, who just looked petrified.

“Leave him alone, you son of a *bitch*.” Mike said.

“Edward Kaspbrak will be with us for some time.” Brenner said, standing up as Eddie let out a low whimper. “As will you.”

“Over my dead fucking body.” Mike said. “I’ll- *fuck!*” His arm was twisted again, and once the man slacked his grip, Mike shouted, “Piss off!” He couldn’t think of anything else to say; his limbs felt like lead, and he still felt *exhausted*.

“It seems like Wheeler will need more convincing.” Brenner told the Guards. “Again. Take him to Solitary.”

Again? What the FUCK does that mean?

Instead of asking, Mike just started kicking and screaming. “Let me go! Let me go!”

“Let him go!”

Mike stopped yelling as he heard Eddie, and heard the yell of a shocked guard. Eddie had kicked him somewhere and was moving forwards, stopping right in front of the guards. He had his fists out, staring between them and Brenner, looking remarkably small.

It was at that moment that one of the guards drew a gun, pointing it straight at Eddie’s chest. Eddie paused for a moment, and Mike let out a scream. He curled up, attempting to summon a shield to knock the soldiers back, only for the second guard to twist his arm again and knock his head into the wall. *Fuck, that hurt.*

“That can’t stop me!” Eddie yelled, staring down the gun. “You know that, you’ve fucking tried!”

“Yeah, but it’ll hurt real bad.” the guard said. “We know that, too.”

Eddie paused, before starting forwards, saying, “I don’t care-”

“I bet you’d care about your friends, wouldn’t you?” Brenner then

said.

Eddie froze in place, as Mike struggled to keep himself from blacking out, tried to yell at Eddie that he wasn't worth it, to go be *safe*.

"I bet Uris and Hanscom wouldn't like extra testing, would they?"

"Don't you fucking dare." Eddie said, turning. And as he was distracted, his original guard moved up behind him, grabbing his arms. Eddie yelled, shocked.

"Leave him *alone*." Mike said, breathing heavily.

"That depends on if he behaves." Brenner said.

"You know you're dead." Mike forced out. "My... my friends. They're coming. They won't leave me. They're coming and they'll kill you."

"They can certainly try." Brenner said. "But we're prepared for powered children. They'll make fascinating subjects—"

"They'll *kill you!*" Mike yelled, finally finding his voice, letting his dark threat energize him. "They'll fucking *kill you!*" And as the guards started dragging him off, he got a grand idea, thinking up a way to get under the skin of the worst man in the world.

"Jane and Kali are gonna fucking *kill you!*"

It worked. Brenner, who was walking down the other hall as Eddie was dragged off, stopped. Mike let himself smile. "You fucking failed! They got away from you, and they're gonna come back to make sure you never hurt them again!"

Brenner slowly turned, staring, as the guards stopped, glancing back at their boss to see what he'd say. After a tense moment, Brenner said to the guards- completely ignoring Mike- "You know what to do when they talk out of turn."

The Guards dragged Mike away, as he kept screaming, yelling threats and curses without thinking. After a few turns, he was thrown into a dark, small room.

"You think you can break me? Fucking try!" Mike screamed.

It was then that one of the guards produced something metal; it took Mike only a second to recognize it from a school project- it was a cattle prod. The other soldier threw Mike up against the wall, as the metal was pressed into his skin.

As he was electrocuted again, Mike tried as hard as he could to bite back his scream. He didn't want them to have the satisfaction of knowing he was hurt. But he couldn't fucking help it. As soon as the electrocution was done, he realized he had dropped to the floor again.

Then the Guards left, shutting the door behind them. Mike was completely in the dark. He couldn't see *shit*, and his head hurt more than he ever thought possible, and he still felt empty and cold and *lost*.

As soon as he realized he was alone, Mike curled up on the floor, and he cried.

8. Kali's just not having a Great Day

Notes for the Chapter:

This chapter a bit short, because, unfortunately, tomorrow's chapter ended up being Long As Shit.

Hope y'all are ready for Party Member Angst this chapter, and even more Mike Angst Tomorrow.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Kali's just not having a Great Day

“You told them *what*?”

El sighed, looking up at her sister as they sat in what was probably a living room. “I told Bev that we’d been in the Lab, and she decided to talk to us. I was going to invite Will, too, but he was only there for a week-”

“Jane, we still don’t know if we can trust them!” Kali said, running her hands through her hair.

“I think we can.” El said, glancing around the room. “Bev, at least.”

“You’ve known them for all of five minutes, Jane, and you want to tell them your entire life story?”

“We’re allies, Kali. They need to know everything about the Lab they can if we want to fight it and get Mike back.” El sighed. “But I know it’ll be hard, so I figured we should do it with as few people as possible. I probably shouldn’t have volunteered you, but...”

“You didn’t want to do it alone?”

El hesitantly nodded.

Kali sighed. “I’m not answering anything I don’t want to.”

“That’s fair.”

That was when Bev rushed down, sitting on the chair across from them. “The others are coming.” she said quickly.

Kali stared at her hair, but said nothing as Mike Hanlon rushed down next.

“Where are Richie and Bill?” Bev asked him, glancing behind him at the staircase.

Mike looked behind himself, shrugging. “I dunno. Bill might be going slow.”

“What happened to Bill’s leg?” El asked quietly, as Hanlon moved to sit down, too.

“We had to cut through a fence to get away from the soldiers chasing us.” Bev said. “While we climbed through, Bill cut his leg on the edges of the wire. Not fun.”

“It’s not like any you got out unscathed, either.” Hanlon muttered.

Bev nodded, lifting her shirt slightly to show the other girls a tight bandage wrapped around. “I tried to get him loose and cut up my stomach a little. It’s pretty light, considering what happened to him, but it still hurts like hell.”

“How did... how did they get the others?” Kali asked.

Bev and Hanlon glanced to each other, before Bev said, “Uh, Stan got knocked out first. Tranquilizer.”

El and Kali nodded. “Did he trip out?” El asked.

It took Bev a second to realize what she meant, and then she nodded. “Yeah. We figured out something was wrong pretty quickly; Stan’s our most... practical member. Eddie tried to carry him away, and we didn’t notice he fell behind for a while. And, uh... when we went through the fence, and Bill got stuck, they were right on our tails. Ben stayed behind to hold them off.”

Before they could say anything else, the door swung open again, and Richie came in, helping Bill walk over. “Hey, assholes!” he waved. “What’s up?”

“For the love of God, Richie, could you be nice to our last hope?” Bev asked, as Richie and Bill sat on the couch.

“Nope!”

“Bev s-s-s-said you have n-n-new info.” Bill said.

El glanced to Kali, who was staring at the ground. “Not exactly new.”

“Will said he was in the Lab. Is this about him?”

“It’s about us.” El said. “We were... we were in the Lab for much longer than he was.”

“You were *what*?” Richie said, shocked, as the others jumped.

“I was brought there when I was seven.” Kali said quietly. “El was basically born there.”

El moved her arm, pushing back her sleeve and showing them her tattoo. “El.” she said. “Short for Eleven.”

They stared in horror, as Bev asked, “They tattooed you?”

“And named me Eleven; I was the eleventh experiment.” El said. “Kali was Eight.”

“The others weren’t as lucky as us.” Kali said.

“I escaped four years ago.” El said, pushing her sleeve back. “Kali broke me out, but she got caught. Will got caught a little before then, but he hid in the vents. I found... I found Mike, and the others, and we broke in to get Will. Nancy blew it up, and... well, here we are.”

She paused, glancing between the Losers. Hanlon was staring at her, dumbfounded. Bev was quiet, curling up a little and watching her cautiously. Richie was staring at the ground, looking nervous, and Bill... well, Bill looked blank. Like he was waiting for more.

“So,” El asked, “What do you need to know?”

The kids all looked to each other. Finally, Bev says, “What’s happening to our friends?”

El stared at her, her mouth feeling dry. She hadn’t expected *this* to be their first question.

To her surprise, Kali answered. “They’re currently going through hell.” When the Losers simply stared at her, she said, “We lived there from a young age, basically brainwashed into behaving, and even we got punished badly for every slight. If your friends dare to fight for themselves... well, it won’t end well.”

“F-fuck.” Bill said, as Bev curled up a bit more and Hanlon gripped onto the arm of the couch. Richie moved his arm to Bill’s gripping it in what might be a small comfort.

“Mouthing Off gets an electrocution, Too Much Noise gets a punch to the face, Refusal to Follow Orders gets forced isolation for however long it takes for them to remember where they put you, and add a bit of anger to the mix and they’ll a beating.” Kali said, apparently not noticing or caring about the Losers’ growing horror. “And the testing—it’s degrading. They make you do anything you can think of, act like you’re an unfeeling monster. They didn’t even bother with names, we’re numbers because we’re not even people to them. If you actually do something daring—try to escape, or beat up an important person—you get the *shit* beaten out of you. And if you—”

“Kali, stop.” El said, shutting her eyes.

Kali did pause for a second, staring ahead at the Losers, who all looked close to panicking. Richie’s hand had gone white gripping onto Bill’s arm, and Hanlon had his hand over his mouth, looking ready to cry.

“Um...” El said, re-opening her eyes and trying to regain herself. “Um, none of their guards are powered. So... so you should be okay in that area. You’re going to need to dodge or block bullets, because if they can’t capture you, you’re better off dead to them. Max can probably speed us in, but we can’t open their doors in speedmode.

Kal and I could probably find the rooms the boys are in. All the sleeping rooms are the same..."

"How soon can we get in?" Hanlon asked quickly.

Bev jumped, looking towards him. Richie gripped Bill's arm harder, and Bill just sadly looked at him.

"It might take a few days of planning." Kali said.

"What happens if they kill our friends while we're waiting?" Bev asked, glaring at them.

Kali stared at her, her expression blank. "Then you save who you can."

They all stared at each other, and then Bill said, "Would it be b-bad if we killed every fucking person in that L-lab?"

Kali shook her head. "Might be better, actually."

After the meeting, the Losers all gathered in Bill's room. They stared at each other for a minute, and then Mike started crying. Richie was next, burying his head in his lap and rocking back and forth. Bill and Bev stared at each other, and then she moved over, hugging him as tightly as she could.

"We'll get them back," she promised, as loudly as she dared. "We'll get them back."

Kali couldn't sleep that night.

It wasn't anyone's fault, really. It was just the instincts she'd picked up from her years on the run. She barely trusted anyone- even her Gang. While she trusted them not to betray her (mostly), she didn't know if she could trust them to keep watch, or to be able to fight, or to be able to wake up on their own if someone should attack in the night. And while she'd been in the Lab, she'd learned to be able to

wake up at a moment's notice, or else she'd get shaken awake and dragged off to a surprise testing in the middle of the night before she could even figure out what was going on. Even after being in a relatively safe environment for four years, her sleep pattern hadn't changed one bit.

She sat up from her sleeping bag at about Midnight, glancing around the room. Jane had finally fallen into a restless slumber, tossing and turning and gripping onto her sheet. Max was completely knocked out, her hair braided up and spread across the floor. And Nancy was beside her, facing the wall.

"Hey." Kali called, glancing at the other older girl. "Why are you still awake?"

There was a pause, before Nancy rolled over; it was too dark to tell, but her eyes may have been red. "How'd you know?" she asked.

"I'm pretty good with body language. And you were definitely not sleeping." she said. "Is it about Mike?"

"What else could it fucking be about?" Nancy asked, glancing away and curling up a little. "And don't say it's not my fault. We both know it was. The Lab was after me, and they probably spotted us because I set stuff on fire. It's because of me that Mike's going through whatever hell he's going through, it's because of me we all ran away from home to rescue him, it's *my fault* you and El are going to have to go back..."

"We're not going back." Kali said, and Nancy jumped. "El and I. We're going in, sure, but not back. We're not getting caught again. We'd rather die."

"You still have to risk it. And it's because I couldn't just fucking tell Mike what was up."

"You know he just would have come with you. He'd have wanted to help. That's who he is."

"Yeah, and then he'd be branded a danger to society, like me."

"We're all branded dangers to society."

“I’m a bit worse in that regard, seeing as I actively destroy shit.”

“So did I.”

“You didn’t get someone you loved captured because you made a mistake.”

“How do you know that?”

There was a long pause. “I- I’m sorry, I didn’t... did you?”

Kali hesitated. “Not exactly. But my run wasn’t exactly a day in the park. And it’s not like I don’t have guilt over things that happened while I was out. Guilt over people who got caught in the crossfire. Whether or not it was worth it... it still hurt to cause suffering in those who didn’t deserve it.”

Nancy slowly turned to her. “We’re fucked up, aren’t we?”

Kali nodded.

“Are we ever gonna be okay?”

“I don’t think so.” Kali said. “But I made peace with that a long time ago.”

“How?”

Kali glanced, just slightly, towards the back of Jane’s head. “You find something to live for. And then they give you hope.”

Nancy sighed. “Mine’s trapped in a Lab.”

“Not for long. I promise you.”

They fell silent for the rest of the night.

9. The Traumatized Lab Experiments have a Playdate

CHAPTER NINE

The Traumatized Lab Experiments have a Playdate

Mike was sitting on the cold, hard floor, staring at the ceiling and still trying to keep himself together, when the door opened. He looked up, glaring darkly at the soldiers outside.

“There’s been a change of approach.” said one. “You have to come with us.”

“Like Hell I am.” Mike said, his voice sounding very rough after screaming all night, when he wasn’t passed out.

The soldier approached him anyway, and Mike stopped himself from flinching back, not wanting to give him the fucking satisfaction of knowing he was scared.

“Do you want to stay in solitary?” he asked.

Mike paused. “I’d prefer not to, but if it means not following you...”

The guard’s hand shot out, and Mike instantly flinched back, instinctively throwing his hands over his head. However, no contact came, and he heard a distinct laughing sound. He felt his heart sink as he realized that he’d failed- the guard had faked him out, and he’d shown weakness in front of the men in the Lab. He tried to keep his breathing even as the man hauled him to his feet, pushing him forwards, still gripping onto his arm. Mike kept his head down, hoping they couldn’t tell he was starting to feel a panic grow in his chest.

They walked down the halls, and Mike eventually let himself glance up, trying to memorize details. Every hall looked the *same*- doors with windows leading to Labs, doors without leading to stairwells, or possibly other rooms with other experiments. Occasionally, they passed large double-doors, and Mike guessed that those led to

training rooms, testing rooms, rooms where they did whatever they could to make their lives a living hell. He expected to be brought to one of those. He was wrong.

They went up a stairwell, and Mike caught a glimpse of the numbers beside each door. They stopped at Floor Eleven- of course they did- and then the guards dragged Mike through more halls. At one point, Mike saw windows on the walls, carefully positioned to show exactly how high up they were. Well, fuck, he couldn't get down that way. They hadn't tested how far he could drop and have his shield save him from the impact of the fall, mostly because El had refused to drop Mike from anywhere too high. And if he fell and died, it would only serve to fuck with his friends- he had no doubt that they'd come for him, even though they probably shouldn't, and if they showed up and he was gone...

He jumped as the Guards stopped at a door. One let go of him to swipe his card into the lock, giving him a stern look, as if to say *Go ahead and try to run, it'll be fun to stop you.* Mike simply glared back, trying to transfer all his hate and fury into one look. The Guard seemed unfazed, simply unlocking the door and pushing it open. The soldier tried to push Mike in, but Mike simply stepped forwards. "I can walk." he said, moving inside the room. It seemed to be empty, with the same white walls the rest of the Lab had, and only one chest in the corner.

"What this shit for?" Mike asked, only to hear the door slam behind him.

He turned, seeing that the door had been shut and locked, the guards leaving him alone for now. Mike hesitated, glancing around until he spotted the security camera in the corner. Ah, so that's how they'd keep an eye on him. Mike stumbled forwards, his legs hurting a little. His head still ached, too, not that he'd admit that to anybody in this building. Mike moved towards the chest, dropping in front of it and lifting the lid. *Might as well see what's here.*

He blinked in confusion. Inside were several toys, probably for small children. *They know I'm almost seventeen, right? Why would they leave me with these?*

He scanned the toys. He saw what looked like a puzzle square in the corner, a small doll without an arm, a stack of colorful building blocks, and a box of what was probably crayons. Mike reached in, picking up some of the blocks and flipping them over. Would they want him to do something with these? Maybe they would throw them at him and make him block them. It seemed like they'd probably throw much more harmful things at him.

Then he noticed something was under the blocks.

Glancing over his shoulder at the door, Mike moved the blocks, eventually unburying the item and pulling it out, inspecting it. It looked like a small stuffed dog- no, a wolf. It was incredibly small, not even twice the size of his palm. Now, why would they have *this*?

Mike flipped the wolf over, and noticed a tag on its tail. Something was written on it, something faded. He had to hold it up closer to his eyes to try and read it.

And then he saw what it said, and the toy fell to the ground.

His chest was starting to drop again, his head light. He found himself backing up, instinctively moving to the corner underneath the security camera, as if the small part of his brain that still worked was trying to hide him as best it could from the Lab's prying eyes. He knew what was happening, but his mind was so far away he couldn't calm himself down. All he could do was grip his stomach and struggle to breathe, struggle to stay awake. He should have been thinking about how to keep himself from completely panicking, from rendering himself defenseless in the most hostile environment he could find himself in. But all he could think about was the tag.

Across the floor, the wolf was on the ground, the tag facing the ground, but its contents were etched in his memory now. On top of the small lettering, spelling out the copyright or warnings or whatever, was a name, written in sharpie by a small child, with handwriting he recognized.

On top of the tag was written *WHEELER*.

Mike didn't notice when the other boy came in, only when he was being calmed down.

He'd been in his own world, feeling everything spin around him. His stomach and legs felt like rocks, and he could barely move enough to breathe, and he *knew* he was having a panic attack, but he couldn't make it stop.

Only, a few minutes later, he heard a voice.

"Okay, okay, you're having a panic attack. I need you to focus. Focus on me. Do you need anything?" he muttered, under his breath, "Shit, what can I get him? We're locked in a room..." And then he said, louder, "Mike. Mike, please, I'm gonna help you."

Slowly, very slowly, Mike started feeling... well, not *great*, but not like the world was going to crumble in on itself. Slowly, he let his sight adjust, and he saw Eddie sitting in front of him.

"Are you okay?" he asked again.

Mike nodded, feeling as if his voice hadn't quite returned.

Eddie breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm *so* glad. You really pissed off that... that *man*, I thought for sure they... well, I didn't think I'd see you again."

Mike watched him for a minute, struggling to form words. Finally, Eddie said, "Do you know why we're here? They just threw me in, saying there was a new arrangement or something. Do you think they're letting us stay together? I didn't think they would, since we've been here we've only been together once, I think they were trying to touch-starve us or something. Maybe they figured out it won't work? But then why are they putting us together? They trying to make us like them? It won't work."

Finally, Mike said, "Are... are you okay?"

"What?" Eddie looked at him in confusion. "Dude, *you're* the one who just had a panic attack. Don't worry, though, I know how to help with those. I used to get them all the time, so did Bev and Bill and Stan and Richie... actually, screw it, all of us did. We did all we could

to learn about em so we could help each other.” he paused. “Is... is it okay to ask what happened?”

Mike pointed towards the stuffed animal, and Eddie rushed over, picking it up. “It’s, uh, cute.” he said, confused.

“The tag.” Mike said.

Eddie read it. “Wheeler?”

Mike gestured to himself.

“Oh. Oh, fuck.” Eddie said, understanding. He tossed the wolf into the trunk, out of sight, and then moved back to sit by Mike. “Did you have it on you-?”

“Never seen it before.” Mike said blankly. “I... I *thought*. But that’s my handwriting- *was* my handwriting. I...”

Eddie stared at him carefully, before saying, “Do... do you know why it might be here?”

“To scare me?” Mike shrugged. “But... but why copy my *childhood* handwriting? I just... I don’t... fuck.”

Eddie glanced up at the camera, above their heads, before turning back to Mike. “Do you know how long ago they took you?”

“What day is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then how should *I* know?”

Before Eddie could answer, the door opened again. They both jumped, staring, as two more boys were pushed in. The second the door slammed, Eddie leapt to his feet, racing towards them and throwing his arms around them. “Stan! Ben!” he yelled.

“Eddie!” they both said, and they were all hugging. Mike backed a little farther into the corner, watching.

“Why are we here?” Stan asked, as they pulled away.

“Were you together?” Eddie asked.

“No, our guards met in the hall.” Ben said. “What is this place?”

“I think it used to be a playroom. There’s some toys in that chest.” Eddie said, gesturing. “And, uh... guys, this... this is Mike.”

The boys whipped around, terror in their eyes, only to turn to confusion when they saw who was in the corner. “Fuck, don’t scare us like that.” Stan muttered. “I thought you said that they got Mike.”

“Different Mike. This is Mike Wheeler.” Eddie said. “He tried to break me out.”

“Is that what the alarms were for?” Ben asked.

Eddie nodded, and Mike slowly stood up, wandering over to the others. “And, no, he’s not a shapeshifter.”

“Then why does he look like Richie?” Stan asked.

“Who’s that?” Mike asked, glancing between the others.

“A friend of ours.” Ben said, holding out his hand. “I’m Ben, that’s Stan.”

Mike shook it, feeling a little awkward.

“What can you do?” Stan asked.

“Forcefields.” Mike said, as they all sat down. He would have demonstrated, but he wasn’t feeling energized at the moment. “You?”

“Energy reading and manipulation.” Ben said.

Stan hesitated. “Uh, sometimes I can turn into a bird, or part-bird. But they... they did some shit to me, and it doesn’t always work right now.”

“How long have you been here?” Mike asked.

"At least a week, probably more. We haven't been keeping count." Ben said. "I don't think they keep us on a regular sleep schedule, either."

"But, we do have some good news." Eddie said, he glanced towards the camera again, and then lowered his voice. "Mike has friends. They're coming for him."

Stan and Ben looked at him, a spark of hope glimmering in the eyes of the latter, pure skepticism in the former. "Really?" Stan asked.

Mike hesitated. "Well, I-I hope they do. They probably shouldn't risk it, but they're kind of... well..."

"Oh, uh, that reminds me." Eddie said, still quiet. "I meant to ask... have you, have you been here before?"

Mike paused. "There was Lab like this in Hawkins, but I was only inside for about an hour to break a friend out."

Eddie paused. "So how did you know... him?"

"Him?" Mike didn't know why he asked. He knew who he meant.

Eddie glanced to the boys, and then said, "The guy who wants us to call him Papa. Who is he?"

Mike clenched his fist, as the other boys jumped. "His name's Brenner, and he's the biggest asshole in the world." They looked to him for explanation, and he said, "He... he's been running these experiments for years. We thought he had died, but apparently not. He... he basically tortured my girlfriend and her sister for years."

"Jane and Kali?" Eddie asked. When Mike jumped, Eddie said, "You were kinda yelling about them to him in the hall. Hard not to hear."

"Well, uh, I actually call Jane 'El.'" Mike said. "It's a nickname. But, uh... yeah. They're definitely going to find us."

"How?" Stan asked. "You said you lived... where?"

"Hawkins, Indiana." Mike said. "But El can track me with her powers-

she's telekinetic, kinda. And we've got basically an army of powered people. They'll take down the Lab, and get us out."

The boys glanced to each other, and then Ben said, "Well, we thought we could stand a chance. Turns out we couldn't."

"It wasn't our fault." Eddie muttered. "They caught us by surprise."

"Still, they figured out what our powers were and how to stop them." Stan said. "What makes you think your friends are safe?"

Mike gave him a dark glare. "They will be. They're amazing, and they'll get us out if we can't get out first."

"Which we won't." Stan said.

"Jesus, stop being a downer, Stan." Eddie said.

"I'm being *realistic*." Stan said. "We shouldn't get our hopes up; it'll be more likely we'll all be trapped here by the end of the week."

"We won't." Mike said stubbornly. "And if El gets stuck back here, I'll kill everyone in this Lab with my bare hands."

"That doesn't sound like a bad idea." Eddie sighed.

"We've *tried* escaping. There are too many of them, and they've got quite a variety of weapons." Ben said. "Even Eddie hasn't lasted long, and he's fucking invincible."

"Well, invincible-ish." Eddie said. "I can feel pain and shit, it just can't kill me, it just incapacitates me enough that they can lock me up again. I guess if they stuck a knife in me and didn't pull it out, or infected me from the inside- oh, Jesus, fuck, I'm just scaring myself now, do you think they'd do that?"

"They wouldn't kill us, would they?" Ben asked. "We're useful to them, it wouldn't-"

"Then what happens when we're *not* useful?" Stan asked. "You really think they'd just let us go?"

They stared at each other for a bit, and then Mike asked, “Why’d they let you talk to me?” They turned to look at him, and he said, “They really hate me. I assumed they’d keep me in solitary until I cracked. Why would they let us talk?”

None of them had an answer, but they knew it couldn’t be good.

They sat in the corner, quietly discussing their lives for about an hour; Mike told them about how amazing El was, and how she’d come into his life and they’d destroyed a Lab, before they’d all formed a Party together. The other boys hadn’t talked much about how they’d formed, only that they and their friends figured out their powers together, and decided to train together.

“Does it have anything to do with those?” Mike asked, pointing to the kids’ hands. The boys jumped, glancing down at the visible, matching scars across each of their palms.

“Uh, we did a blood oath as kids. You know how it is.” Eddie said.

“My friends and I never tried that.” Mike said.

“It was... interesting.” Ben said awkwardly.

“Yeah, my Mom having a fucking panic attack because my hand was sliced open was *definitely* interesting.” Eddie sighed. “She thought I’d joined a satanic cult and was going to bleed to death or something.”

“Do you think your Mom’s worried about you?” Mike asked, curling up a little.

Eddie flinched, and the other boys glanced away. Finally, he said, “Well, probably has been for the last year and a half. I got pissed at her and left, I live with Bev in a secret house in the woods now.” He paused. “Now that I say it, it sounds kind of weird.”

“My Mom’s probably worried. She went into full panic mode when those kids went missing a few years back, and she’s probably freaking out now that we’re all gone without a word.” Ben said.

"My parents are probably nervous, too." Stan said. "Though they might think we all just ran away together in some teenager pact."

"What about your parents, Mike?" Ben asked, and Mike jumped.

"They, uh... they probably don't... don't..." Mike tried to keep tears from coming to his eyes, but he didn't do a very good job. "They... well, my Mom might notice, but..."

The Losers all looked to each other, knowing they'd crossed a line. But before they could say anything, they heard a click, and then the door opened behind them. They all turned as guards entered- quite a lot more than was probably necessary. Mike jumped his feet, positioning himself in front of the others. And as a guard moved forwards, Mike threw up his hands, surrounding the kids in a light barrier. They all gasped, and Stan said, "Mike, *what are you doing?*"

"They can't get through this." Mike said. "They can't get through my forcefields. I'd use this to escape, but we wouldn't be able to open doors without dropping the field; we could try jumping out the window, but I'm not sure if that would work."

"What are you *doing!* When this field drops, they're going to *kill us!*" Stan yelled, looking panicked.

Outside the forcefield, the soldiers were turning towards another one, trying to figure out what they should do. Finally, one approached the field, standing just outside of it, as Mike said, "Go *away!*"

"Mike, please, don't piss them off, it'll make it worse..." Stan said.

"Fuck off!" Eddie said, not listening to his friend at all.

The soldier outside stared at them, and then said, "You're going to want to drop the field. We still have the cattle prod."

"You can't reach me in here!" Mike said.

"How long can you hold this?" Ben asked quietly behind him.

About fifteen minutes. Maybe we can bluff them.

Unfortunately, the soldier pulled out the prod and, after a second, pressed it to the light barrier. Mike froze, panic overtaking him, as suddenly, the field flickered.

And then shock completely overtook him, and he dropped to the ground, screaming.

Before he blacked out, he heard the other boys yell beside him. He tried to open his eyes, tried to call out to them, tried to keep himself awake so that he could protect them.

He failed.

Notes for the Chapter:

The Rational part of me: you know Mike would have a lot of health complications as a result of him passing out this much-

The Writer part of me: KNOCK HIM OUT KNOCK HIM OUT

10. Will, Jonathan and Dustin go Shopping for Explosives

CHAPTER TEN

Will, Jonathan and Dustin go Shopping for Explosives

“Is everyone here?” Bev asked, scanning the crowd that had gathered in the Living Room, as Nancy started spreading papers and sheets onto the ground.

“I think so.” El said, looking up from the floor. Everyone had awoken early to freshen up and then gather, hoping to get their plans together as quickly as possible.

“Alright, then. Let’s get started.” Nancy said, clapping her hands together. “Now, we don’t have blueprints for the Lab, but we have the ones for their base in Hawkins, so it should be a similar layout.”

“Where’d you g-get that?” Bill asked, eyeing the blueprint.

“El and Kali’s Dad is a Police Officer.” Dustin said. “And he’s powered, like us. He gets us a lot of cool shit.”

“They’ll keep the kids on the higher levels.” Kali said, pointing ahead at the blueprints. “So that if they try to escape, they have a long way to go, giving the Lab enough time to grab them. But they’re probably not on the highest, so if the kids have to be rushed out for an emergency, the workers don’t have to walk up all the flights of stairs.”

“They don’t have elevators?” Hanlon asked.

“Too easy for the experiments to use.” El said.

“Is everything based around keeping the experiments trapped?” Steve asked.

Kali and El nodded. “That’s their end goal. Can’t have powered kids

running around, telling people what happens in there, can they?" Kali said.

"Jesus Christ." Steve said.

"So, we're going to have to get to the upper levels?" Jonathan said.

Kali and El nodded. "But we're not sure which one. I'd say start at the ninth or tenth floor and keep going up."

"I can run everyone up there in a few seconds." Max said. "But we can't open their doors in speedmode, and... well, we figured out what happens if I go in-and-out too much."

"I could probably cause a good distraction." Nancy said. "If I blow some shit up and tell them I want my brother back."

"Too dangerous." Kali said, as Steve and Jonathan both said something similar. "If you get captured, we're back to square one."

"So we need a distraction that doesn't involve one of us putting themselves in danger?" Will said.

"Sounds kind of difficult." Lucas said. "I mean, we don't have bombs or anything."

"Actually..." Jonathan said, an idea coming to his head.

"You brought *bombs*?" Dustin said.

"No, no." Jonathan said. "But I remember when I was a kid, I had this book where they made homemade explosives. I remember most of it, I think, and-"

"Are you sure it was accurate?" Max asked.

"Well, I can always check Google. We've all got phones." Jonathan shrugged.

"We don't." Hanlon said.

"Had to d-d-ditch them so we couldn't get tr-tracked..." Bill said.

At that point, Bev looked up and said, “Wait a minute, where the *fuck* did Richie go?”

The door opened, and Richie rushed in. “Sorry, sorry!” he said, throwing a jacket on over his shirt. “*Someone* froze over the shower again!”

“Sorry.” Hanlon said, turning a little red. “Can’t help it.”

“I think you do it just to fuck with me. Never happens with Bill and Bev.”

“Bill controls water, and I can summon dark energy to melt shit for me.” Bev said. “You’re just a dick.”

“Fuck off, Bev.”

“Focus!” Lucas said, and amazingly, the Losers listened. “Alright, so, what kind of stuff would we need for this homemade bomb?”

“You know, I feel like they probably shouldn’t have put that in a book.” Will muttered under his breath.

“I’m not sure it would all be here, but if there’s a store or two in town, I could probably get the stuff.” Jonathan said.

The Losers glanced to each other, and Bev said, “Well, uh, you *could*, but...”

“Well, for st-starters, the L-Lab will prob-probably have people in t-town.” Bill said, curling up a little and hugging his knees.

“I won’t go alone.” Jonathan said.

“I’ll go!” Will volunteered.

“I’ll go, too.” Dustin said. “I can get us some more food- you guys haven’t got much in the fridge.”

“You looked in our fridge?” Hanlon asked.

“No, I did. Your food supply is shit.” Max shrugged. “And, guys, you

don't even have to do. I'll just run to the stores, steal some shit, and get out.”

“Yeah, because *that* won’t attract Lab attention.” Nancy said.

“I’ll be careful.”

“They get even a *suspicion* that you’re in town, we’re all in trouble.” Kali said, before glancing to El, who was looking interested in the expedition. “Which is why *you’re* not going. Of all of us, we shouldn’t be seen. Actually, Will, you should probably stay, too.”

“I want to go!” Will said. “I want to help!”

“Let him go, Kal. We’re not gonna be in town for long.” Nancy said.

Kali narrowed her eyes, but nodded slowly.

“Alright, Losers, debrief them on anything they should watch out for.” Nancy continued. “The rest of us will head to- you guys have a basement? Okay. We’ve gotta freshen up our powers. We’ll probably have to fight our way out, especially if we’re taking four prisoners out with us.”

“Okay, so, we’re all considered Missing.” Richie began, as he tossed a wad of cash at Jonathan. “So don’t mention you know us, try not to react to missing posters, that shit.”

“I have money; you can keep your own.” Jonathan said.

“Yeah, we probably should.” Hanlon said, as Jonathan passed him the money. “We’re probably gonna have to go on the run after this, we’re gonna need it.”

“Oh, yeah.” Dustin said, and they turned to him. “What are we gonna do after we get Mike? Go back to Hawkins?”

They paused, before Will said, “We’ll just... have Nancy destroy the Lab on the way out. They probably won’t bother us again, since they can’t legally get near Hawkins, so... maybe you guys could all come

with us.”

“I would like to get out of this town.” Bev sighed. “And it’d be nice to take my boys with me.”

“Would... would you really take us back?” Richie asked, looking a little hopeful.

“Yeah, yeah.” Jonathan nodded. “Of course.”

Richie paused, then handed him a map. “We’ve outlined the store. There’s a pharmacy right across the street if any of you need any medication.”

“Oh, Will and I can handle that while Jonathan gets our explosives.” Dustin suggested.

“Yeah, d-d-don’t say that in public.” Bill said.

“I’ll do my best.” Dustin shrugged. “Anything else?”

“Yeah.” Bev said. “Can you get some cigarettes? We’re out.”

There was a long pause, before Jonathan said, “Why do you need cigarettes?”

“For smoking.” Bev said.

“Why are you *smoking*? ”

“Because we can.”

“No, I’m not getting you cigarettes!” Jonathan said. “You’re gonna get cancer, good God!”

Bev groaned, as Richie said, “Cheer up, Beverly Darling. Once we’re in Hawkins, we can guy all the cigarettes ourselves.”

“No, you *can’t*! ”

“Okay, are you sure you’re be alright?” Jonathan asked again.

“Are you sure you should go alone?” Will asked again.

They stared at each other, and then Jonathan said, “I have the weapons wall pictures. I’ll be fine if I get attacked. Plus, if you hear screaming, you can come get me.”

“Fine.” Will said, and Jonathan turned to leave, after handing the boys some money.

They were standing in the street of Derry, watching as people passed by, barely giving them a second glance. Will had assumed in such a small time, strangers might be suspicious, but, well, if the Lab had figured out how to integrate itself, they might be used to it by now.

“Alright, so, if they have them, we’re getting your anxiety meds, Mike’s depression meds- he’ll probably need them once he gets out- some ibuprofen for the girls- Max’s cycle should start soon- and Nancy wrote something on the list, too. Oh, and Richie said that Stan has antidepressants, too.”

“Is this gonna be enough money?” Will asked, as they walked towards the pharmacy, his bag thumping against his leg.

“I have some extra, just in case.” Dustin said. “And if not, we’ll just have you run over to Jonathan to get some more.”

They stopped just in front of the glass window, staring in surprise at the pictures taped to it- missing posters, ones they’d been warned about.

“Do you think we should...” Will wasn’t sure how he’d finish that sentence, but Dustin just shook his head.

“No. We don’t want to look suspicious, remember?”

Will paused as he scanned the posters. “Wait a minute. Not all of them are here.”

“Huh?”

“There are only four posters, and seven missing kids.”

“You’re right.” Dustin said. “Shit, I forgot, cause we’ve met four, my mind just...”

“Bev’s not here, but she said she’s been missing a while.” Will said. “And... and I don’t see... what’s his name? One of the ones in the Lab. I think they said he lives with Bev...”

“We don’t have time for this. Let’s just get the Meds and go.” Dustin said, pushing Will towards the door before he could realize who else was missing.

As they entered, Dustin said, “Alright, go find your own stuff. Oh, and if you see pads or tampons, I think everyone’d probably appreciate some more.”

“I think those a pretty expensive, unfortunately.”

“Hey, your brother’s paying for it.”

Will shrugged and walked through an aisle, scanning for a bottle that looked familiar. As he finally found something, reaching up to grab it, he heard, “Who are *you* ?”

He jumped, only barely managing to keep gripping the bottle, as he turned around, seeing a blonde girl behind him, looking very pissed off. Shit, shit, had he done something wrong? Fuck.

“Uh...” was all he could think of to say.

“I’ve never seen you before.” the girl said again. “You a new kid?”

“I... uh...” *Fuck!* “I’m just... just passing through. Had to get my... my meds.”

“Aw,” the girl said in a mocking tone, “So you’re one of those kids who can’t get out of bed without freaking out.”

Before Will could stop to think, he said, “That’s a shitty thing to say.”

The girl laughed a little. “What are you gonna do about it?”

“Hey!”

Will sighed as Dustin ran up, grabbing his hand. “Hey, bro, I got some stuff, but I need your help carrying it.”

“Oh, are you his brother?” the girl asked, looking a little thrown off.

“Yep. And we’re in a hurry. Our Dad’s waiting for us and he’ll be pissed if we forget anything.” Dustin said, dragging Will off as fast as he could.

As soon as they turned the aisle, Will said, “Thanks, she was a bitch.”

“Yeah, and you suck at social interaction. Got it.” Dustin nodded. “Let’s just get our stuff and get the fuck out of here.”

They grabbed everything on the list that they could find before going up to the counter. Unfortunately, the Pharmacist tried to small-talk them.

“Where’re you going, boys?” he asked, as he started to bag their items.

Dustin paused, trying to think of what towns existed in Maine. “Uh... Augusta.”

“What’re you doing there?”

“Visiting our Aunt.”

“Your Aunt?”

“Yeah. The, uh, the meds are for her. And us.”

Before the Pharmacist could ask anything else, the blonde girl walked up behind them, saying, “Dad, can we take those fucking posters off the window?”

“Now, Gretta,” he said, turning towards her, “Those kids haven’t been found yet.”

“Everyone in town knows what they fucking look like by now. We don’t need to keep the posters up, it’s been two damn weeks.”

“And the kids are still missing.”

“Fuck, we have missing kids all the fucking time in this town. Hasn’t anyone else disappeared yet?”

“Gretta!”

As the Pharmacist continued to argue with his daughter, Will scanned the counter, finally landing his eyes on a stand of cigarettes. He paused, his first thought being that he probably shouldn’t have those so easily accessible, he thought adults were supposed to keep those behind the counter, or maybe that was just a Hawkins thing? But he got an idea as he looked at the boxes, and his first thought was, *You can’t do that, that’s illegal!* But, well, he was about to burn down a Lab.

Slowly, as the two Derry residents continued to argue, Will reached out and grabbed a box, shoving it into his jacket pocket. He had a quick burst of panic, wondering if he’d been spotted, but, no, there was still a fight going on. Dustin noticed, though, side-eyeing him but not saying anything until after the argument had finished, Gretta had stormed off, and the Pharmacist handed them their bag.

As they stood outside, waiting for Jonathan, Dustin said, “So, you’re gonna give Bev her cancer sticks?”

Will shook his head, feeling the cigarette box weighing down his pocket.

“So what’re they for?”

Will paused. “I have an idea...”

They spotted Jonathan leave the other store, and then they walked off towards him, without another word.

11. The Losers almost blow up the Basement

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Losers almost blow up the Basement

Sometime after Jonathan, Will and Dustin had left, the Losers had joined the Party in the basement. They gasped as Max, fully transformed, rushed around them, before stopping near the wall, clapping her hands together to de-transform, her hair flying over her shoulders. “Hey, fuckers!” she waved, as the others laughed. “Looks like Speedmode is still on!”

They stared some more, before Bill said, “H-h-h-how d-did...”

“How did you *do that?*” Richie yelled, staring in shock.

“The speedmode? That’s my power, I thought we showed you.”

“No, the... the clapping thing.” Bev said, gesturing slightly. “With the... the suit.”

The Party members all glanced at each other, and Nancy said, “Are you telling me that you guys can’t transform?”

“Transform?” Hanlon asked.

“I mean, it did take us a while to figure out.” Lucas said.

El paused, before going over to the Losers, grabbing Bev first and dragging her to the center of the room. “Okay,” she said quietly, “We can transform, give ourselves suits and stuff. It works to completely disguise us, as nobody can tell who we are until we drop the transformation.”

“That explains why we didn’t recognize you.” Bev said.

“So, if you can’t transform,” Kali asked, as the Party members all backed against the wall, realizing what El was doing, “How have you

been fighting in town?”

“Bev made us outfits, and our masks completely cover our faces.” Hanlon said. “We were wondering how you kept your disguises with such minimal face covering.”

“Okay, so here’s how it works.” El said. “But you’re going to want to be careful, sometimes first transformations can be... dangerous.”

“Lucas apparently blew something up.” Steve said, “But he won’t tell us any more than that.”

“I almost blew something up, that’s the story.” Lucas said.

“Okay, you’re going to want to hold your hands out like this.” El said, demonstrating. “Then try to focus your energy inbetween your hands, use your powers to charge yourself. And then when you feel the energy buildup, you...” She clapped her hands together, and she felt waves of warmth shoot up her arm, and as the Losers gasped behind her, her transformation finished. El ran her hands through her hair, before stepping back and letting the Losers all say something to the effect of, “That was *awesome!*”

Once they quieted, El said, “Why don’t you try?”

Bev paused. “I... I wouldn’t...”

“It’s okay, just try to channel your energy.” El said.

“And don’t get upset if you don’t get it on the first try.” Nancy said. “It sometimes takes a while.”

El eyes Nancy as she backed up, realizing at that moment that she’d never found out how Nancy had figured out her own transformation. But now wasn’t exactly the time to ask.

Bev paused, before holding out her hands. She said, “Just warning you, I’ll probably be in a shitty mood. My powers kinda rely on me focusing on bad memories and feelings, so...”

“Understood.” El said.

Bev shut her eyes, and soon, black clouds of energy were flowing between her hands, bouncing off of her palms. Her face fell as she did, and she stood for a few minutes, as the Losers eventually caught the drift and moved against one wall. After a few minutes, she groaned and threw up her hands, letting the clouds dissipate. “It’s not working! I don’t feel anything!”

“It’s okay, it’s not always instantaneous.” Lucas said.

“Maybe Mike should try first.” Bev said, pointing back to the boy against the wall. “He’s had his powers the longest, he could probably figure it out better.”

She moved back towards the wall, pushing Hanlon forwards, and as she did, Max said, “Wait, I thought you said you got all your powers together?”

“Well, kind of.” Hanlon said, as Bev slid to the floor. “Uh, Ben kind of... unlocked everyone’s powers, but I’d had mine for a while. I just didn’t tell them until then. Didn’t want them to know.”

He slowly let snowflakes spread between his palms, watching as they flickered back and forth. The room suddenly started to feel a lot colder, but nobody really felt like complaining, not when Hanlon might be able to transform.

After a few moments, he said, “Uh, there’s this... this feeling in my arms?”

“That’s good!” Lucas said. “Try to clasp your hands together now, bring the energy together.”

Hanlon obeyed, and then he said, “Uh, it feels... weird? Is that...”

In a flash, energy shot up his arms, covering his entire body. The Losers screamed, moving forwards, but in a few seconds, their Mike had turned around, saying, “Whoa! Whoa! I’m okay!” And then the Losers were staring at him.

His outfit was gone, replaced with a pale gray and blue suit, decorated with white flakes. His gloves and boots were also a pale gray, and his mask was blue. Everyone was quiet for a minute, before

Richie said, “No fucking way! Mike, that’s so fucking cool!”

“Is it?” Hanlon glanced down, smiling a little at his appearance.
“Holy shit, yeah, this seems cool.”

“There’s a mirror upstairs, you could probably bring it down.” Bev said.

“Yeah, the rest of you can try again.” Steve said, moving forwards to drag Bev back into the center of the room. “Come on, give it a shot again.”

“I don’t know...”

“Bev gets really t-t-tired if she uses her p-powers for too long.” Bill said.

“Everyone does.” Kali shrugged. “It’s a side effect.”

As Bev slowly started to send out her energy again, El wondered just how much the Losers didn’t know. Did they know anything that the rest of them didn’t? Or was the Party just more knowledgeable about powers? How much research had the Losers been able to do?

By the time Mike Hanlon had brought down the mirror, leaning it against the wall, Bev finally said, “I think I feel... something.”

“Alright, keep going.” Nancy said; the Party had all sat down, looking ahead at Bev.

Bev brought her hands together, and after a moment, her transformation had completed, too. She gasped, running her hands over her dark skirt, saying, “That felt... that felt good !” She glanced down at her outfit; her skirt matched her mask, gloves and boots, but her shirt and leggings were a dark red, and her hair was pushed back with a red headband. She rushed off to look, while Lucas got up and dragged Bill into the center.

“I d-d-don’t know. I’m not v-v-very good at my p-powers.” Bill said.

“You’ll figure it out, it’ll be okay.” Lucas said. “We’ve all figured it out.”

At that, Steve glanced at the ground, biting his lip. El noticed but didn't say anything, as Bill started letting the white energy cloud flow into the air.

"So," Bev asked, as her and Hanlon walked over to the party, "We can't be recognized at all?"

"Unless you tell someone your identity, remove your mask, or are seen transforming." Max said. "But I'd suggest, like, not going into town dressed like that. Kinda obvious you're not normal."

"And, as a bonus," Lucas said, backing up to the corner, "You should be a lot more powerful now."

"Yeah, I can run a lot faster while transformed." Max said.

"My illusions last longer." Kali said. "I checked."

"And you get tired less." El said.

"I think it's w-w-working!" Bill said, and they all turned as he pressed his hands together. He glanced back up. "What do I do now?"

"Just hold it!" Nancy called.

As he obeyed, El said, "Nancy, I... I wanted to ask... your transformation-"

At that moment, there was a flash, and they all turned to see Bill, dressed in white and a pale yellow. He cheered, and Bev and Hanlon joined in, rushing over to tell him what they thought, and dragging him to the mirror to see himself.

"Alright, Richie, you're up!" Nancy said, jumping up and rushing away from El.

As El drew her attention to Richie, she realized that he'd been sitting in the corner, oddly quiet, for a long while. As Nancy approached, however, he jumped to his feet, shaking his head. "Naw, naw, I'm good. You guys have fun, though."

"Please, you'll be fine." Nancy said.

“I... I don’t think I’d be able to. Not much energy to channel.”

“Well, you can try borrowing someone’s powers.” Nancy said. “Hey, maybe your suit’ll be different with each power! And if that doesn’t work, Will could show you how to transform without absorbing anything, maybe your transformation is like his.”

“No, no.” Richie still shook his head, as the Losers turned towards him, confused.

“Come on, R-R-Rich, it’ll be f-fun.” Bill said.

“Yeah, it really is *bitchin.*” Bev said.

“No, I’m good.” Richie said again.

“Come *on,*” Nancy reached forwards, lightly grabbing Richie’s arm, probably to drag him to the middle of the room.

Instantly, however, Richie recoiled, ripping himself away from her, even as his eyes flashed a dark orange. “*No!*” he yelled, suddenly sounding panicked. “Don’t fucking touch me!”

There was an awkward pause, as Nancy stepped back, a little confused, and Richie realized what he’d just said. He glanced towards the Losers, before saying, “I... I don’t want to transform. I’m gonna... I’m gonna be upstairs.”

And he took off at a run, leaving them all in the dust.

“What was that?” Steve asked, turning towards the Losers.

They looked to each other, before Bill said, “He’s... sensitive?”

“He doesn’t like doing things he doesn’t want to do.” Hanlon said.

“Why wouldn’t he want to transform?” Max asked.

They glanced to each other, and then Max said, “I’ll go see what’s up with him, yeah?” She rushed off, leaving everyone behind.

The Losers looked after Max, looking like they wanted to follow, but

after a second, Bev turned to El, and asked, “So... uh, what do your other transformations look like?”

Up in his own room, Richie sat on his bed, rocking back and forth.

He hadn’t meant to freak out, he *really* didn’t, but... with how his powers worked, he didn’t want... they couldn’t see... and...

He buried his head in his knees and screamed.

After a second, though, he looked up, and held out his hand. He could feel heat rush up his arms, rush around his body.

Nancy probably shouldn’t have touched him.

He watched as flames flickered across his palm, and felt his face go soft.

So that’s what her powers feel like.

12. The Lab is just kinda The Worst

Notes for the Chapter:

Chapter Warnings: Yeah, a lot of violence in, like, any Lab chapter. Just a heads-up for that.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Lab is just kinda The Worst

Mike awoke in a cold, bright room. He had to wait a few moments for he could even see; the sudden light hurt his eyes. He hissed and flinched back, covering his eyes. Every part of him still ached. He slowly opened his eyes, examining the room, and his first image was a large, glass window on the wall in front of him.

Well. *That* certainly did wonders for his mental health.

Mike curled up some more, his eyes flickering back and forth across the room. There was only one table in the center, with a single chair beside it, and otherwise it was empty, except for the glass. Damnit, God *damnit*, he was in a testing room. Fuck. Fuck, fuck, *fuck!*

He sat in the corner, rocking back and forth and trying to prevent himself from falling into a panic attack. He tried starting at the table, studying it, to prevent himself from looking at the Glass.

He was there for what might have been hours or might have been minutes when he heard the door open, and he shot up, pushing himself farther into the corner, upon seeing a tall woman enter. She gave him a cold look, before shutting the door behind her. Out of the corner of his eye, Mike could see men watching them from behind the glass.

“Alright, kid, we’re going to need to run some tests.” the woman said.

“No.” Mike said.

The woman sighed, rolling her eyes. “We need you to-”

“No.”

“-throw out your forcefeild-”

“No.”

“-and we’re going to test its durability against-”

“*No!*” Mike screamed, as the woman approached him. “*No! Get away!*”

The woman grabbed his arm, trying to drag him off. Mike screamed, and, before he knew what he was doing, he curled in, and threw up his shield, knocking her into the table. He paused to breathe for a few seconds, before dropping the shield. If they *wanted* his forcefield, he wasn’t going to give it to them.

The woman turned around, giving him a dark look, before she grabbed him again. He started screaming as she gripped onto both of his arms, shoving his side into the table. He knew she was trying to make him hurt, trying to make him summon his forcefield, trying to make him show off his powers, but he wasn’t going to, he wasn’t going to do what they wanted, he wasn’t going to do *shit* for them.

The woman threw him to the ground, giving him a sharp kick to the stomach. Mike screeched, curling in on himself, hoping to God he didn’t throw up, *please don’t let me throw up...*

“That’s enough.” Mike heard a voice from the doorway, and it took him a few painful moments to realize who’s voice it was. *Goddamnit, I fucking hate him!*

The woman did back off, and then Brenner was standing over him. “Get up.”

“Fuck off!” Mike yelled, still gripping his stomach, keeping his eyes shut so that he couldn’t cry.

“You’re going on a little trip. And if you try to run, you’ll be electrocuted again and left in Solitary until you learn to behave.”

“Leave me alone!”

He felt a cold hand on his shoulder, and he froze. How dare he, how *dare* he grab him? “Get up.” he said again.

Mike considered just shrugging him off and staying on the ground, but, well, there was something *very* threatening in Brenner’s tone. He didn’t doubt he’d follow through on his threat, and he didn’t know how many times he could be electrocuted before it caused permanent damage. He had a feeling that the Lab wouldn’t care if he lived or died, and he had to survive long enough for the others to find him.

So, very slowly, he pulled himself to his feet. He tried to shrug Brenner’s hand away, but he gripped his shoulder, pushing him forwards. “Take him to further experiments.” Brenner said, and Mike’s stomach sank.

As the woman pulled him away, Mike started screaming. “No! Let me go! *Let me go!*”

If Brenner heard him, he didn’t care to respond. Mike was dragged off by the woman, dragged into the hall. “Let me go!” Mike kept yelling. He kept kicking at the woman, struggling, trying to break free. Just when he thought he could, two guards turned the corner, taking him away from the woman and dragging him off. He kept yelling, kept screaming, not caring anymore if he got hurt, just caring that he inconvenienced these people as much as possible.

It seemed like forever by the point he was dragged into a room, the door slamming behind them. And then he was forced into a chair while his eyes were still adjusting to the dim light, his hands strapped down. Once he realized what was happening, Mike started kicking, wildly moving his legs, trying to prevent them from completely strapping him down. This didn’t work, and in a minute, his legs were tied down. Something was strapped to his head, and Mike realized after a minute that they were attaching wires- or as much as they could without chopping off his hair. He wondered why they hadn’t cut his hair like they’d cut El’s, but it didn’t matter at that point. He kept yelling, kept tugging at the restraints, trying to loosen them and get out.

The guards finally finished whatever they were doing, and then they stepped away, and Mike was alone, still struggling and screaming with an increasingly hoarse voice, trying to figure out how to get *out*.

And after a minute, he heard a voice from behind him; he couldn't even turn his head to look. "Okay, kid. Now, we just need you to summon a forcefield."

"Let me go!"

"We know you use your hands for large ones, but you should be able to summon one around one hand without removing the restraints."

"Let me go!"

He heard a sigh behind him. "Look, kid, we just want to see what you can do. Now, you can make this easy for us, or we can *make you* do what we want."

As Mike's eyes started to adjust to the low lighting- seeing only a wall ahead of him- he felt a cold pang in his chest. He couldn't respond for a minute, an involuntary fear gripping onto him. He knew what the man meant by that, and he didn't *want* to get hurt.

But, well, he'd rather die than help the Lab.

So, with a very shaky voice, he said, "No."

Ben did everything they said, to an extent.

Sure, he did what they asked. He made people sleep, he energized people, he read their levels. He let them strap wires to his head so they could read his brainwaves. And he didn't make trouble. He kept himself quiet.

He knew that made him the favorite. And so he used that to his advantage.

He didn't try to escape, so when the guards dragged him around halls, they gave him a loose grip. Sometimes they just let him walk in

front of them, so they could text someone or check up on a call. So when they weren't looking, he could peer through windows. Study the halls. Figure out the layout.

He had the eleventh floor perfectly mapped out in his mind- for some reason, memorizing architecture came easily to him. And he had most of the tenth and twelfth floors- some of the experiments took place there. Most importantly, he knew where the stairs were. So when the time came to escape, he could at least get the others to the lower levels. He wasn't sure how he'd get them past the electric fence, but they'd figure something out. They always did.

The biggest problem was the fact he didn't know where the other boys were kept. He could guess; he knew which rooms were *not* dorms, and the room he was in didn't have a window and had more complicated locks, so he could look out for those. But now that he had *three* boys to look out for instead of two, an escape would have to take place when most of them were out, or after he'd figured out exactly where they all were staying.

Still, it was hard to be the perfect Experiment. The Lab workers got suspicious on occasion, he could tell by their glances and glares. And sometimes, while he was being taken through the halls, or while the training rooms were quiet, he could hear his friends scream. And that was hard. It was hard not to react, not to cry, not to beg the Scientists and Soldiers to *please* make sure they were alright.

Eddie screamed the most, at least for as long as they'd been there. Testing Invulnerability was not exactly a pleasant task, especially when Eddie's powers didn't prevent him from feeling pain. But he heard Stan sometimes, too, struggling to summon his talons, or perhaps trying to defy the Lab and summon his wings.

But, as he was waiting in a testing room, waiting for someone to make him test his energy until they were satisfied or until he passed out, he heard new screams.

It occurred to him then that he hadn't heard Mike being tested yet.

And it awoke a new feeling, a feeling he couldn't pinpoint. It wasn't only that he heard a kid he liked- was it too soon to call him a

friend? He didn't think so, but he'd call him an ally at least-screaming in pain, far away and far beyond his help. There was also the added, dark knowledge that he sounded exactly like Richie. Like one of Ben's best friends.

If they couldn't get out soon, Ben had no doubt that the other Losers would be found. The Lab would find them wherever they went. And they'd all be screaming, too.

So Ben shut his eyes, and thought to himself, *We have to get out.*

It's time to think, Ben. Time to think of a way out.

When Mike was dragged back through the hall, he didn't scream or kick this time. He stayed silent, keeping his head down until they reached their destination. And then he shoved into Solitary, and the door was closed, and he was in the dark again.

He'd be in the dark for a while, he assumed. They weren't too happy with him after how experiments had gone. And, well, he wasn't feeling too great himself.

He slid to the floor, curling onto the ground. The floor was too hard, and too cold, and his entire body *ached*. And he couldn't even cry. He couldn't even *fucking* cry, because any kind of movement just hurt.

So he just curled up, pulling his hospital gown around him, and tried to stay calm.

He didn't do a very good job.

13. Bev and Will play Twenty Questions

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Bev and Will play Twenty Questions

“Hey, can I sit here?” Max asked.

Richie looked up from the bed, clenching his fist before she could see the flames, before shrugging. “Free country.”

Max moved, sitting down and glancing around the room. “Clean.” she finally said.

“Yeah. Mike and Stan clean when they come over, and Eddie refuses to go into any room that might have dust in it. If it weren’t for them, we’d all probably live in a dumpster.” Richie laughed a little.

They stared at the wall for a second, before Max said, “So, uh, you don’t want to transform?”

He shook his head.

“Wanna tell me why?”

He shook his head again.

“Well, uh, the others are gonna ask. You know that, right?”

He nodded. Max had never seen this kid so quiet.

“Are you... are you scared that you can’t?”

“No.” Richie sighed. “It’s... it’s complicated.”

“How so?”

“I just... have a bad history with my powers. Let’s put it like that.”

“Bad History?” When Richie didn’t answer, Max slowly said, “Yeah,

uh, I didn't discover mine under the best of circumstances either. My Stepbrother was being a dick and... well, I ran. And he figured it out and used it as blackmail."

Richie glanced at her, and then he said, "He does sound like a dick."

"Heh, yeah. I haven't seen him in four years, though, so there's that."

"Four?"

"Dustin's a much better brother anyway." Max shrugged. "And my powers are pretty sweet. Your powers are, too! You can just take anyone's."

"Yeah, but I can't do shit if I'm alone. Unless I have a baseball bat."

"You play baseball?"

"No, but I've figured out how to beat the shit outta someone with it."

Max bit her lip, her face falling slightly. "Mike once beat the shit out of someone with a flashlight."

"Really?" Richie's face lit up. "My doppleganger's got a nice weapon selection."

"Seriously, it was way more badass than it sounds."

"If you say so."

They grinned at each other, and then Richie said, as fast as he could, "How long did it take for Mike to transform?"

Max hesitated. "Uh, a bit longer. He and El did it together. We weren't there, but I expect it was hard for him, what with..."

"With?"

She probably shouldn't be telling him this, but... well, it might be important information, seeing as they were going to need to save Mike, and if Richie had a similar problem...

"Mike has, uh... some pretty severe PTSD. He got his powers from an

accident, and the accident... wasn't pretty. His powers were a trigger for a while, and..." She trailed off as she glanced towards Richie's face; he looked *horrified*. "What?"

"I just... I..." he stumbled a little, before coming to, "I can't imagine how awful that must be. Having powers but not being able to... and because of the... shit." He glanced away. "Makes my reasons for not wanting to transform seem a bit shallow."

"I'm sure they're not."

"It's just... I guess you could say that my worst fear... and I had to have it shoved in my face to even figure it out... well, it's being forgotten. Going missing and nobody caring. It's... and the fact that the Transformation *literally* makes the people you love unable to recognize you... just seems like a shitty way to disguise yourself, right? I mean, I've got Bev's outfits, I can use..."

He paused, as Max said, "I think... I think that's okay. I get it. And I think the others will, too."

"Yeah, but I'd rather not go around telling my deepest darkest fears to a buncha people I haven't... I've only known for a bit."

"Well, your secret's safe here." Max said. "Trust me, nobody gets information out of me. I've kept all that Lab shit a secret from everyone for four years."

"Ooh, you think that's a big secret, you should..."

Richie cut himself off quickly, his face going white.

"What?"

"Nothing. It's—"

The door opened, and Hanlon peered in. "Hey, uh, Max? Your friends got back. Jonathan's gonna need some help putting our weapons together."

"Gotcha." Max said. Hesitantly, she stood up, glancing towards Richie, before leaving the boys alone.

Once she was gone, Mike Hanlon turned to Richie and said, “You okay?”

“Course I am, Mikey.” Richie said, jumping to his feet. “You know me. Always happy.”

Will waited until everyone had divided up- Jonathan took one group with him to the basement to build their explosives, while Nancy and Kali took another to go planning. He’d said something about needing to practice his powers, and so he was left alone, sitting in the Living Room and waiting.

He read through a book he’d packed with him- *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*- and peered over the pages whenever someone passed by to grab a snack or use the bathroom. And finally, after two hours, she came.

Bev passed by him, towards the bathroom, and Will jumped up the second she was out of sight, rushing towards the room to wait outside the door.

Once she left, she glanced at him, saying, “You need to go, too?”

“I have some questions for you.” Will said.

Bev raised an eyebrow. “Questions?”

“You’re not telling us everything.” Will said. “And I’d like to know what you’re hiding. Can be just between us if you want.”

“And why would I tell you anything?” Bev asked.

In response, Will reached into his pocket and showed her the cigarette box.

Bev glanced at it, something sparking in her eyes. Then, she said, “Meet me on the roof, I’m gonna make some excuse to duck out. You get...” she paused, thinking, “Twenty Questions, with one honest answer.”

"And if you lie or can't answer, I get another one free." Will said.

Bev smiled a little. "Deal."

As Bev crawled out of the window, edging along the roof, Will spoke. "I've written down all I could think, but I don't have twenty questions, so you'll owe me."

"Damn, kid, okay." Bev smirked, sitting beside him and pulling out a lighter, before taking a cigarette from him and lighting it. "Want a puff?" Will shook his head. "Probably good. Your brother'd probably kill you."

"Those cigarettes'll kill you."

"Hey, if you were gonna judge, you shouldn't have bribed me with em." Bev sighed. "Alright. Fire away, kiddo."

Will sat up a bit straighter, staring at the ginger girl. "How did you all end up together?"

"Eh?"

"You and the Losers. How'd you find each other? Does Derry have some kinda superhero support group?"

"I fuckin wish." Bev laughed. "No, we ended up hanging out because nobody else liked us. The other kids made fun of Bill's stutter, Stan's religion, Eddie's hypochondria, Richie's... well, Richie's anything, Ben's body type, Mike's race, and my..." she trailed off. "Well, they didn't like me. The boys invited me to go to the Quarry once, and then we saved Mike from Bowers and his friends, and that was it. It was gonna be the seven of us, forever."

"So it wasn't because of your powers."

"Nope. Ben thinks that it might have subconsciously drawn us together, but none of us knew we had any powers until the..." she paused, eyeing Will. "That's your next question, isn't it?"

“What?”

“How we discovered our powers.”

Will paused, then said, “That was actually Question Three, but we can do that now.”

Bev sighed. “It’s... it’s *really* hard to explain but there was... about three years ago, a- a serial killer was in town, kidnapping and killing kids. He had... he had the power to make them see their worst fears so that they died terrified. We all got hit with the power at some point, but we managed to survive long enough to try and find him. Then my... then I... well, I got kidnapped and knocked out, and before I knew it, the Losers had found me and Ben woke me up, and we killed the son of a bitch. While we were fighting, Ben screamed and accidentally awakened his energy powers, which rebounded onto us and woke our powers, too. We spent years training after that, trying to figure out exactly what we could do.”

She paused. “The boys don’t like to talk about it. I don’t, either, so if you could not mention it around them, that’d be great.”

Will fell silent, watching her smoke some more, before she said, “Next question?”

“Um...” Will glanced down at the sheet of paper he had. “Oh, uh, well... do your parents know where you are? And why can’t they help?”

Bev paused. “Well, my parents are both dead, may they rest in Hell.” she said. “Ben’s Dad is God-knows-where, Eddie’s Dad died when he was five, Mike’s parents are dead. My Aunt’s still in Portland, Eddie ran away from his Mom a year and a half ago, Bill and Richie’s parents couldn’t give two shits about them... the only ones who might notice we were gone are Stan’s parents, Ben’s Mom and Mike’s Grandparents, but they don’t know about the powers. I’m sure once the Lab gets all of us, they’ll release some sorta coverup and then none of our parents will help us.”

“So,” Will said, continuing, “Who’s missing from the posters?”

Bev paused, lowering her cigarette slightly. “What?”

“In town,” Will said, “There were-”

“I haven’t been in town for almost three years.” Bev said.

Will continued, “There were only four missing posters. You and one of the kidnapped kids- Eddie?- were missing, but I can’t really remember who was and wasn’t there...”

“I’d say either Bill or Richie, then.” Bev shrugged. “Again, parents couldn’t give a shit.”

Will considered, trying to remember whose faces he saw. Eventually, he shrugged and said, “What exactly are the powers of the other boys, again?”

“Stan has Bird Physiology.” Bev said. “Can summon talons and wings. If he concentrates, he can turn into a full bird- an eagle, if that’s your next question. It hurts him, though, and we don’t know why he insists on always having his wings out. He *loves* his wings, loves flying. Ben controls a person’s energy levels, and can open up formerly closed energy paths, like our powers. He can also read energy levels sometimes- he figured out when Richie accidentally took drugs once- *long* story there. And Eddie’s, we basically described already. Invulnerability, minor healing powers.” She paused, before adding, “Anything else?”

“Just... just one more question.”

“Okay?”

Will hesitated, before asking, “How... how did they get kidnapped?”

Bev froze, staring ahead, her cigarette almost dropping out of her hand.

Finally, though, she said, “Are you sure you want to know?”

Will nodded. “I want to know. I need to know about the Lab. What they did to him, if it’s how they got me-”

“They got you ?”

Will groaned. “Shit, I didn’t... I... fuck.”

Bev paused, and then said, “You *did* say you were there for a bit. I, uh, forgot about that.”

“I was only there for a bit.” Will admitted. “They... they grabbed me off the street, knocked me out. When I woke up, I was being dragged inside, and I beat them up and escaped into the vents. That’s when I met Kal and... well, I was only caught a little bit before they broke me out. So I don’t know much other than... other than how shitty that place is.”

There was a pause, and then Bev said, “We were at the Quarry.” As Will turned to her, she shut her eyes and said, “We’d been running for about a week, we stayed at the Well House first, but that creeped us out and it was still in town. We hid out at the Hanlons’ but Mike was worried his Grandfather would find us, and when the Lab came knocking we just *ran*. Then we were at the... at the Quarry. Stan got tranquilized. It took us too long to figure it out, but once he started tripping out... we found out that the Lab had found us. I had to shoot up an energy cloud to block another dart that was coming at us, and then we ran. Eddie stayed behind to help Stan, and he got caught. We had to... we had to get through a fence to try and get away from the people chasing us, and we got cut up, and Ben stayed back to fend them off. He didn’t catch up. By the time we’d realized what had happened, Richie was in a full-on panic attack, he was screaming and sobbing and wouldn’t let us touch him, and Bill and Mike were crying, and... and we only barely found a place to hide...”

Bev curled up a little more, tossing the cigarette off of the roof and into the forest. She buried her head in her knees, before saying, “It’s our fault. We should’ve stayed behind. We should’ve helped them. We should’ve...”

Will stared at her for a second, wondering what he should do. She glanced back up at him, before saying, “I’m sorry. It’s our fault.”

“It’s not.” Will said. “It’s not, it’s the Lab. They’re the ones who took your friends, if you’d stayed behind, they’d have taken you, too, and

there would've been nobody to tell anyone where the Lab was. You'd have all been trapped there."

"At least we'd've been together." Bev whispered.

After another long pause, Bev said, "You got any other questions?"

Will shook his head. "Not for now."

"Alright."

So they sat on the roof, while Bev lit another cigarette, and Will stared off into the woods.

14. The Experiments get Tested

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Experiments get Tested

When the door opened the next morning- or maybe it was night?- and the guards entered, Mike didn't scream. He just glared up at them, still on the ground, as they stared down at him.

"Well, kid, get up."

Mike averted his eyes, before saying, "Piss off."

"Okay, kid, we can make this easy or hard. How would you like that?"

Mike bit his lip, glancing away, and then he repeated, "Piss off."

The guard approached, but before he could get close to Mike, the teen slowly stood up, still glaring at the ground.

"Alright, you gonna come with us?"

"Got nothing else to do." Mike said, but he spoke in an almost-monotone. He didn't *care* at this point. No matter what he said, the same thing would happen; even if he was nice, he knew they'd still take him to the experiments, and he'd still refuse to do what they wanted. This was just going to repeat until he got out.

The guard grabbed his arms, and Mike let out an involuntary shout, pain shooting up his limbs. The guard hesitated for a second, confused, before continuing to drag him down the hall. Mike flinched as every time he moved as they went down the wall, his legs still feeling very sore, and with the guard still gripping his arms, which probably felt a bit more painful than it should be.

The Guards skipped over dropping him off in the Testing Room, instead taking him directly to the chair, strapping him in and

attaching wires to his head. He finally started talking, then, saying, once again in an emotionless voice, “Honestly, you couldn’t make the chair a bit more comfortable? I’m gonna be in here all day.”

“Shut up.” a soldier said.

“I don’t fucking think so.” Mike said, still glaring up at the soldiers.
“Hey, what are the wires for? What do they do?”

“God, just shut the *fuck* up.”

“No, I wanna know. Do they read my brainwaves? How do they do that? You know, I’m super into science. It’s my best subject in school. You know? The school you took me away from?”

The Guards finally left, having finished whatever they were doing, and Mike suddenly felt a chill sweep through him, knowing that *something* bad was coming. He took a deep breath, trying to keep himself from looking scared, from looking vulnerable. He just had to last long enough for his friends to arrive, and then...

And then what? They’d break him out? They could, they *could*, don’t think about how El almost died last time, don’t think about how the Lab knows exactly what we can do so they’ll be prepared, don’t think about whether or not the Lab has Nancy, and if they don’t, did she forget him, or not care, or did she... did she make it out of the fire...

DON’T think about that.

Instead, Mike focused his attention ahead at the wall. Someone would start talking, he assumed, ordering him to make a forcefield, or shoot light strands, or do something else for them. And he’d refuse, he was *not* going to be their toy. And then, well, he’d have to brace himself...

Fuck. He was starting to cry. *Fucking* hell.

Unfortunately, that was when the door opened.

The door, which had been almost impossible to distinguish from the wall ahead, was pushed open by Brenner, and upon seeing him, Mike felt his chest tighten. He glared at the man for a long while, before

saying, “I hope you know that I’m not gonna do *shit* for you.”

“I’m sure you think that.” was the response. “We have tests for you today-”

“Fuck that.”

Brenner sighed, and then he said, slightly over his shoulder, “Bring him in.”

The door opened again, and then two guards walked in, dragging a kicking and screaming Eddie with them.

“Fuck off! Let me go! I’m gonna *fucking kill you!*”

Mike felt shock grip him, and he stared ahead at the boy who was cursing and yelling.

“Mr. Kaspbrak hasn’t quite gotten the hang of how things work here.” Brenner said, only just audible over the yelling. “Much like you. He’s injured several employees in his anger. His friends have figured out the routine by now. I expect that you will soon, too.”

Mike stayed silent, once again reverting to using his silence as a defense mechanism. But he was a little worried that the fear in his eyes was becoming more and more visible as he slowly started to suspect what his friend was doing here.

Eddie finally looked up, seeing Mike. He turned to Brenner, hate fuelling him, as he said, “What the fuck are you doing to him? Why am I *here*? Want me to tell him to shut up and obey? Cause I’m not doin that shit. I’m not doing *shit!*”

“No, no.” Brenner said, as Mike slowly started to pale. “I just decided that I’d rather have your tests be in here today.”

The full impact of these words hit both Mike and Eddie at once. While Eddie simply started cursing and screaming, Mike just yelled, “No!”

But Brenner simply turned to one of the Guards, who nodded, and then threw Eddie to the ground, swiftly kicking him in the stomach.

Eddie screeched, trying to roll over to jump up again, maybe make a break for the door, but the other Guard was there, pulling what seemed like some kind of staff off of his belt, and then Eddie was hit again.

“Stop it! Stop it!” Mike yelled.

“It won’t kill him.” Brenner simply said.

“You’re hurting him!” Mike screamed, as Eddie was hit again. “What the fuck is wrong with you? You’re torturing a kid!”

Brenner didn’t respond, instead turning to the Guard and saying, “Why don’t we repeat the fire test? Perhaps the burns will heal faster this time.”

Mike felt his stomach drop, as the room started blurring. *Fire. Burning. On fire. ON FIRE.* And Eddie’s screaming definitely wasn’t helping matters. Mike tried kicking and pulling at his restraints, tried getting *out*. “Eddie!” He yelled.

He only managed to hold on to the sliver of hope that he could get out of the chair and save Eddie and get *away*, until one of the soldiers pulled a match from his pocket and struck it against the wall, lighting it.

And then Mike was screaming, “Okay! Okay!”

Brenner held up a hand, and the guards paused. Eddie glanced up briefly, still curled in on himself to offer himself minimal protection, breathing hard and staring up at the others.

“Okay, okay.” Mike repeated, ashamed of himself for crying, for letting himself *cry* in front of *them*. “I’ll summon my fucking fields. I’ll shoot light strands. Whatever you want. Just leave him *alone*.”

And suddenly, Mike knew why Brenner had let him stay with the Losers, even if it was for only a few hours. It was for this. It was all a setup, a plan to make Mike befriend them. And if he had friends, he had a weakness, he had something to exploit. And the Lab not only had a new way to get to him, they had a new way to hurt him. A way that he couldn’t shake off.

And now that Brenner knew it worked, Mike doubted he'd be seeing much of the Losers anymore.

Brenner nodded at the Guards, and then Eddie was dragged to his feet. He finally spoke, "No! No, Mike, what are you doing? Don't- I'm not." The Soldiers started to drag him off, and he kept yelling. "Get off me! Mike, don't do it! Just let them hit me, I can take it, *don't give them what they want! Mike!*"

But he was still dragged away, dragged out of the room. Mike watched him until he was gone, and then he bit his lip and dropped his eyes to the ground, not wanting to look at the man standing beside him.

"Well," Brenner said, very matter-of-factly, "We'll read your signals for a while, and then after that, we'll test your shield's durability. And remember," and he moved down, grabbing Mike's face and turning it towards him with his cold hands, and Mike shuddered, that feeling of *wrongness* once again echoing through his body.

"Remember," he said slowly, "We have three other experiments. We don't need all of them."

It was a clear warning. Any one of them could have been dragged in front of Mike, any one of them could be tortured and killed as a punishment for another.

Mike really didn't want to help the Lab, not at all. But he also didn't want those boys to die, especially not because of him.

So, trapped, Mike nodded.

Just as Brenner started to leave, Mike said, as fast as he could, "*Have I been here before?*"

The man slowly turned towards him, as Mike ran through everything in his head. "*Put him in Solitary AGAIN.*" The wolf toy. Even four years back, he remembered a recognition in Brenner's eyes as he saw them.

Brenner simply said, "Is that what you think?"

Mike stared at him, not feeling well enough to say anything else. And then Brenner turned and left. Mike glanced towards his lap, hoping that anybody who was watching couldn't tell he was still crying.

The voice behind Mike said, "Okay, Wheeler, forcefield."

Mike sighed, and then, in a second, a small sphere of light was flickering around his hand.

"Good job."

Mike wanted to puke.

Stan was sitting in the experiment room, waiting.

The guards had been gone for too long, much longer than they'd left him alone in any experiment sessions before. He wondered if something had happened; maybe one of the boys had escaped, maybe something was going wrong, maybe... maybe somebody had gotten *hurt*...

As he sat alone, Stan decided to try for his wings again. He gripped onto the table as he stood, bouncing on the soles of his feet, trying to focus completely on the space on his back that his wings could extend from. He could still feel that *thing* on his back- he didn't know what it was, he couldn't tell from under his hospital gown and when he was allowed to take a shower, it was still too dark to see. But maybe if he tried hard enough, maybe if he focused, he could break his wings out. He'd broken shirt fabrics before- and had to think of some way to explain to his parents what had happened- so maybe... maybe if he just *focused*...

He felt that familiar pain in his back, but it was a pain he was happy to have. It was a pain he'd gotten used to, a pain that meant he'd be *flying* soon. Flying away, flying above it all, flying *free*.

But, like had happened for the last two weeks, just as his back reached peak pain, the pain that usually meant his wings were about to appear, nothing happened. No wings burst from his back, no hospital gown tore. Instead, the hurt just built up, hurting more and

more, probably turning his skin red, as his wings tried to free themselves, tried to come out, tried to break through his skin and spread out and fly him out of that hellhole. But nothing happened, except more pain.

Stan finally let out a yell, dropping his focus and falling to the floor, still trying to grip onto the table as he caught his breath. He tried not to cry, but he couldn't help it as tears started to stream down his face. These people had taken his *wings* away, they took away his freedom, and God only knew if they'd ever give them back.

Mike was being moved through the halls. He still refused to look the guards in the eye, still felt the hate boiling over inside of him, but this time, he felt the utter *shame* building up in him as they walked.

He'd let the Lab study him. He'd let them get more information, build up more knowledge of what he could do.

You don't have a choice. Mike thought to himself. *They would hurt Eddie, or Ben, or Stan. They would hurt the others. They're using them against you. It's not your fault.*

He was having trouble convincing himself.

And then a guard moved by, looking directly at the soldiers holding Mike's arms, and he said, "Drop the kid off in the training room and then report to the vans."

"We're supposed to test him."

"You can do that later. Powered kids were spotted in the woods."

All at once, everything inside Mike froze up.

"They're going to need reinforcements. These kids are... well, they don't take kindly to us."

No, no, no...

"We've gotta get there and knock out the fast one, if she's there,

before she can get the other ones out.”

No!

“*No!*” Mike screamed, and the guards all looked to him, suddenly remembering that he was there. His eyes widened as he screamed, and suddenly, life came back to him. He started kicking and moving, trying to break the hold of the guards. He had to get out, he had to get *out* . “No, don’t you dare! Don’t you fucking dare! Leave them alone!”

“Get him somewhere.” the first soldier said, and then Mike was being dragged down the hall, still kicking and screaming.

He could barely think, barely come up with some kind of strategy for getting away, he just kept shouting and moving and trying to break the hold of the men holding him, but it was a bit difficult, especially since he still ached from yesterday and was drained from the powers he’d just displayed.

So a door opened, and he was thrown into a testing room, and the door was shut and locked behind him. He turned, pounding on it, screaming and sobbing as hard as he could.

“Leave them *alone!*”

15. Let's Blow Shit Up

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Let's Blow Shit Up

"It's just the middle of the woods." Jonathan said, shrugging. "I don't think we'll be in that much trouble."

"Could be." Kali said. "Especially if you're spotted."

The teens watched as the adults argued back-and-forth. They'd been helping Jonathan make his bombs- disguised as plastic bottles, apparently- all night, taking shifts for sleep. And they'd finished all the ones they could, but Jonathan wanted to test the first few before they finished planning for the Attack.

"If they don't work, we'll have to start over." Steve said, on Jonathan's side of the argument. "We just need to blow some stuff up and then leave. Not too dangerous. Might not even be seen from far away."

"They won't be, I don't think." Jonathan said.

"Look," Bev piped up, as the others turned to her, "If we're gonna go, can we go? I'd like to get my friends out of the Lab before they die, thanks."

"Okay, here's what we'll do." Nancy said, directing everyone's attention towards her. "Some of us will go with Jonathan, the rest of us will stay here. If any of you get into trouble, text me- you all have my number?"

"We don't have phones." Hanlon said, while the Party members nodded and the Losers shook their heads.

"Then stick close to someone who does." Nancy said. "Who's going with Jonathan?"

El raised her hand, earning her a glare from Kali. Will and Bev also had their hands in the air. After a second Lucas said, “I’ll go, too.”

“Alright, the rest of us will plan.” Nancy said. “Though, I think you should have one more adult—”

“We can take care of ourselves, Nancy, Christ.” Lucas rolled his eyes.

“I’ll go.” Kali volunteered, though she still looked wary.

“Alright.” Nancy said. “Okay, everyone, get the blueprints.”

As people started filtering out, El noticed Richie stop by Bev. “Do you want to come, too?” Bev asked quietly, barely audible above the talking from the rest of the crowd.

Richie hesitated. “Kinda.”

“Then come on!”

“But what about... about the...”

“Oh. Oh, shit, you’re right.” Bev said. After a second, she passed him something, and whispered, “Light these on the roof, nobody will see you. I’ll meet you for more when we get back.”

“Where’d you get these?”

“Found em in a coat pocket. Now go.”

After Richie left, El approached Bev. “What’s wrong with Richie?”

Bev jumped, before saying quickly, “Nothing. Just... bad eyesight, you know? Anyway, should we transform or something?”

El hesitated, glancing after Richie, before saying, “No. We’re just... blowing things up. Not anything dangerous.”

“God, our lives are weird.”

Up on the roof, Richie took out the pack of cigarettes, slowly pulling

one out. After a second, he held out his finger, and a flame burst out, lighting it. Nancy hadn't even noticed him brushing by her as he ran up, hadn't noticed his eyes flash that dark orange color as he raced past.

He knew he was going to feel like shit as soon as the flames went away- that was just how it worked. Why he couldn't go out with Bev, in case he had to use his powers; he felt like shit after every power transfer.

But, well... he liked using Nancy's powers.

And, plus, now he didn't have to carry a lighter around with him in order to smoke.

There was a loud noise, a crash, and then the group stared ahead at the crevice in the ground.

“Fuck yeah!” Lucas cheered.

“Whoo!” Will shouted, as Bev started whooping.

El looked ahead at the crater, as Kali said, “You think that’ll take down the fence?”

“Well, I should hope that I don’t accidentally cause a bigger explosion by combining this with the electricity of the fence.” Jonathan said. “But so long as Dustin is nearby, he may be able to-”

“Is that a possibility?” Kali asked. “A bigger explosion?”

“We’ll stand at a distance.” Jonathan said.

“Sorry, *what?*”

As the adults started arguing, Bev slowly moved over to El. “Hey, you okay?”

El nodded, still staring at the crater.

"Anyway, I want to test two more. Make sure this isn't just an isolated incident." Jonathan said. "Come on, let's find another clearing."

As they followed him- with Kali muttering under her breath- El slowly turned, staring into the trees. She thought she heard the bush rustle, thought she heard some kind of disturbance behind them. She looked closely, a small panic clutching her.

Were they being watched?

"Jane, are you coming?"

El hesitated, staring after the bushes. She felt like she should say something, but at the same time... at the same time, they should hurry and finish up. If she made everybody paranoid now, they'd just go back to the house, and she knew Jonathan would still want to test, and that would just be more time they'd spend preparing instead of saving Mike.

So she said, "Yeah. Yeah, coming."

And she turned and left.

After the third explosion, Kali said, "Okay. Okay, that's good. The bombs work. Let's go home."

"Come on, Kal, it's not that bad." Lucas said.

"Not that bad?" Kali asked, glaring at him. "We're basically playing in the Lab's backyard right about now."

"It's okay, it's a big forest." Will said quietly, though he did avert his eyes, staring at the grass.

"I think I agree with Kali." Bev said. "The boys and I haven't been out of the hideout since the attack. We don't want to get spotted agai-"

"Everyone shut up!" El yelled, and everyone turned to her, shocked.

“El?” Will asked, confused. “What’s up?”

El turned, staring into the trees. She *definitely* heard something this time. She slowly turned towards the bush, and then she threw out her hand, letting out a scream.

As soon as her hand was raised, they all saw someone thrown from the bushes, hitting against a tree and falling to the ground. Before he could, however, they all caught a glimpse of his uniform, and knew instantly who it was.

“Run!” Kali shouted, moving herself to the back of the group as she pushed the rest of them into a run.

And the group ran, rushing as far as they could. They didn’t even focus on where they were going, only that they had to get themselves far, far away.

After a minute, Bev stopped everyone, looking at a fallen tree, and said, “I know where we are. We need to split up, there’ll be less of us to track. Jonathan, take some back to the hideout, and I’ll take everyone else to a hiding spot.”

Too panicky to argue, they nodded. Will gripped onto his brother’s arm, and they rushed off. El hesitated, looking between her sister and the others, and Kali said, “El, go with them. If they catch one group, they shouldn’t be able to get a hold of both of us.”

El nodded, gave her sister a quick hug, and then rushed after the Byers.

“Alright, now, follow me. There’s a good place they won’t check.” Bev said, and she rushed off, with Kali and Lucas following after her.

“Alright, here.” Bev said, standing over a spot between some trees that seemed to be covered by leaves.

“What are we doing?” Lucas asked.

Bev dropped to the ground, reaching through the leaves. Finally, she

found something, and pulled up, and the leaves fell, revealing a trapdoor. “Get in!” she said, and Kali and Lucas shared a brief glance before leaping down. Bev pulled a cigarette out of her pocket, then dropped it on the ground, before she followed the others, and the wind blew the leaves back over the trapdoor, hiding it, as the cigarette rolled against a tree.

The two Party members glanced around, a little impressed. The room wasn’t too big, but it definitely wasn’t crowded, and it was furnished with a little table, several lamps, and a nice carpet- or, well, a carpet that was probably nice once upon a time, before it was placed underground.

“This is the Underground Clubhouse.” Bev said, smiling a little. “Pretty cool, huh? We dug it ourselves before we discovered our powers, but after we did, Bill and I figured out how to channel our energy clouds to dig up some more, so it’s a lot bigger now.”

“And the Lab doesn’t know where it is?” Lucas asked.

Bev shook her head. “They only caught us here because we were playing outside. If they found this place, we wouldn’t know about it.”

“Because that makes me feel better.” Lucas muttered.

Bev sat down on the carpet, and after a second, Kali and Lucas joined in.

“We should probably be quiet.” Bev said. “In case they come near. Lucas, text Nancy and ask her to send Max after the first group, then us. Tell her I left a cigarette above our position.”

“She can track our phones, it’ll be fine.” Lucas said, as he pulled out his. “Hope to God the wifi isn’t too shitty.”

“She can-”

“Nobody else can track them, just us.” Kali explained quickly. “Will and Jonathan’s Mom and my... and Hopper figured out how to block out the government and any other trackers that aren’t ours.”

After that, they fell silent, waiting for someone to come.

After another minute, Bev said, “This is boring. Let’s talk about something.”

“This isn’t supposed to be *fun*.” Kali said, a hint of anger in her voice. “I *told* them this was a bad idea. I told them we’d get caught! Now the Lab knows we’re here and...”

She stopped for a moment, taking deep breaths, and it suddenly became clear to the other kids that she was struggling not to cry. “I’ve been out of that Lab for four fucking years. And even longer before then. And now they know I’m here and they know that *my sister* is here and if they get to her... if they... fucking hell, I just...”

They fell silent. Finally, Lucas said, “Just texted Max. We should have a few minutes.”

“Oh, well, isn’t that wonderful.” Kali muttered.

Bev turned to her, and, quietly, said, “Are... are you gonna help us break into the Lab?”

Kali started. “What?”

“I mean, it’s... it’s fine if you want to stay in the hideout.” Bev stumbled over her words. “I get that... that the Lab is probably bad for you. But if you’re gonna stay there, we should probably... I mean, you guys probably planned that already, I just want to... to know...”

“Whether or not I’ll help your friends?”

Bev jumped, looking up guiltily at Kali. Lucas looked, too, not entirely sure what to say.

“Of course I will.” Kali said. “And of course I’m going into that Lab. They don’t get to ruin my entire childhood and the childhoods of God knows how many other kids only to get away with it, not if I can help. And besides,” Kali shrugged, “If there’s anybody in that Lab I recognize, it might be fun to show them exactly who’s in control now.”

Bev smiled a little weakly at her, as Lucas stared at the carpet, suddenly fascinated by the pattern. After a second, he said, “Kali?”

“Yeah?”

“Mike’s not gonna be okay, is he?”

Kali stared at him for a second, before saying, “Oh, Lucas...”

“El and you... you guys got hurt every time you did... you did something they didn’t want.” Lucas said. “And... and Mike’s never held back. Everyone thinks he’s a pushover, but... but he’s *not*. He always says what he wants, does what he needs, he’s stubborn and... and they’re gonna fuck him up. Even his shields can’t last forever, they’re gonna hurt him because he won’t do shit for them, and even if he *does*... if he does, those people seem fucking psychotic enough to hurt him anyway. And... and if they try to get information on El out of him, he *won’t* tell them, even if they kill him- are they gonna kill him?”

“Lucas...” Kali started.

“And what happens if they get to us?” Lucas asked, looking up at Kali, tears in his eyes. “We won’t do shit for them, but how long will that last? How long until they break us or kill us or-”

Kali suddenly leaned forwards, throwing her arms around the teenager. Lucas started, surprised. “Don’t think about that.” Kali said. “Don’t think about that because it’s *not* going to happen. We’re getting him out, and we’re getting him out *soon*, and *none* of us are getting trapped there ever again.”

Lucas nodded a little, and glanced at Bev, who had turned to stare at the wall.

They fell silent after that, not daring to speak. In only a few minutes, they heard a tapping on the trapdoor.

“Are you down there?” they heard Max’s voice, sounding a bit panicky.

“Here!” Bev called.

“Alright, get up.” Max said. “We’re getting back to the house, *now*.”

16. Group Therapy in the Basement

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Group Therapy in the Basement

“Thank God!” Nancy sighed, moving forwards to hug Lucas.

As Kali moved off into the crowd that had been waiting for them to return, going straight to El, Bev raced towards the nearest trash can and threw up.

“Yeah, that happens.” Max shrugged, as Bill, Richie and Mike Hanlon all yelled. “It’s a side-effect of speedmode.”

“Is everyone here?” Nancy asked, glancing between everyone; after Max had brought Jonathan, El and Will back, she’d gone out for the rest, and everyone else had gathered in the Living Room, everything packed up in their suitcases and placed below their feet, just in case.

“I believe so.” Max said, glancing around.

“O-Okay.” Bill said, and everyone turned to him as he struggled to stand. “We have a pro-protocol for this. B-Bev, can you-”

“Got it.” Beverly said, jumping to her feet and rushing away.

“M-Mike, get the rest of them to the b-basement.”

“Will you need anyone?” Hanlon asked.

Bill shook his head. “I think I’ll be able to g-get downstairs after I clear the fr-fridge.”

“Okay.” Hanlon said, before turning to the Party Members. “Everyone get to the basement. Now.”

Down in the basement, Mike Hanlon pulled up a trapdoor, shuffling everyone down. Beneath the basement was a hidden compartment, which was slightly similar to the Underground Clubhouse, only bigger, with thicker walls, and more furniture. After Hanlon leapt down, he said, “Okay, there’s a cooler in the corner for food. We’ve got books over there, flashlights in that chest, a first aid kit in the cabinet, and- well, make yourselves at home.”

As the Party members glanced around, Hanlon grabbed Richie’s hand and dragged him into a corner, in the shadow of a bookshelf. El was the only one who noticed the urgency in Hanlon’s walk, and then she flickered her eyes up, noticing that Richie looked a little pale. She glanced towards the others, and then followed the Losers, standing against the bookshelf as they talked.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Hanlon was saying. “You look tired. Did you overuse your power again?”

“No, I’ve just been here with them.” Richie said. “Planning with Nancy, helping Jonathan build his bombs and shit, you know?”

“Richie, really, you look like you’ve overused.”

“I haven’t been doing *shit*.”

“Just... just maybe sit down for a bit.”

“Jesus, fine, Mike. Stop parenting me.”

As Hanlon stood up and walked away, El watched him go, before slowly moving over towards Richie, sitting in front of him. He looked up at her blankly, and... yeah, he didn’t look great. “What’s up, Ellie?”

“Okay?”

“Yeah, I’m *fine*. I just get tired easily. It’s not a problem.” Richie shrugged, looking a little annoyed. “You got any questions?”

“What’s going on?” El asked, glancing around the room. “What are we doing?”

"This is our hideout. We came up with a plan in case of a Lab attack. This is a secret compartment, where we can hide for a while. Our protocol is to wait a few days, and then send out."

"Days?" El asked, eyes widening. "We can't just *wait* a few days."

"Well, we have to hope the Lab has enough time to forget about us." Richie shrugged. "Can't have them dragging us in, can we?"

El bit her lip, glaring at the floor, but said nothing.

After a second, Richie reached into his pocket, pulling out a box. He opened it, showing El that a deck of cards was stored inside. "Ever play?" he asked.

"Play?"

El wandered off after a few rounds of whatever game they were supposed to be playing, going to talk to Kali in hushed whispers. Dustin, Lucas and Max had a blueprint of the Lab out, still working on their plan layout for who would go where and how they'd get out and all that fun stuff. Jonathan and Steve were talking about explosion strategies. Bev and Bill came down after a bit, bringing extra food and water with them, and now they were sitting with Mike, occasionally shooting Richie glances- Bill more than the others, to Richie's annoyance.

So, after glancing around for a bit, Richie stood up and wandered over to Nancy, who was sitting alone.

He really did feel like shit, not that he'd tell Mike. Mike didn't need to know that he'd been stealing powers without permission. He'd meant to ask, really, he did, but he just... it was a *thrill*, brushing against Nancy and feeling the flames flicker to life inside, before running to the roof and sitting and playing with fire for an hour, lighting Bev's cigarettes with his own fingers. Of course, after that hour, the power faded, and his energy sapped with it. He hated that. The others had their power overuse problems, of course- Bill, Bev and Ben had passed out before, the latter two multiple times- but not as

bad as him. After an hour of one power, or too many quick snippets of others, he felt completely sick. And of the times he *did* pass out, once he was out for almost a whole twenty-four hours. Of course, he knew why this way, but he would go to Hell before telling anyone but Bill- and only Bill, who'd accidentally found out that...

Richie sat by Nancy, and felt his breath catch in his throat for a second, staring at her. Finally, he said, "So, you've got my doppelganger for a brother?"

Nancy laughed, turning towards him. "Fraid so." she paused. "Yeah, I'm afraid we haven't talked much since I asked you why you look like him." She held out her hand, smiling. "Let's start over. Nancy Wheeler."

Richie stared at her, before taking her hand. Instantly, his eyes flashed a dark orange, and Nancy retracted her hand, having seen the light. "Oh, sorry." she said. "Sorry, I..."

She trailed off, and then Richie suddenly remembered what had happened the day before. "I'm, uh..." he said. "Sorry about the transformation thing."

"Uh..." Nancy said, glancing away. "It's, it's okay. I shouldn't have pushed, and I get if you don't like touching people, I guess I just gave you fire, sorry..."

"It'll wash out of my system." Richie shrugged. "But, uh, do you want to show me some cool tricks?"

"Maybe when we're not underground. We set something on fire, we're in deep shit."

"Aw, come on, Billy can just throw some water on it."

Nancy considered, and then she held out her palm, summoning flames into the center. "Try this?"

Richie obeyed, acting as if he hadn't been practicing earlier.

"Okay, good." Nancy smiled. "Now, check this out."

She narrowed her eyes, focusing, and suddenly, the flames shifted. It took Richie a minute to realize she was forming the flames into a shape, almost sculpting the fire with her eyes. It formed into a silhouette of a girl, a girl who seemed to be running in place. Richie's eyes lit up, the fire reflected in his glasses. He clenched his palm, letting his own fire disappear. "Wow." he said. "Who's that?"

Nancy's face fell, and suddenly, the flames vanished. "Her name was Barb." she said quietly. "She's... she's not around anymore."

Richie bit his lip, looking to the ground. "I... I'm sorry."

"Have you..." Nancy asked, quietly, as she glanced away, "Have you ever lost anyone?"

There was a long, awkward silence, before Richie said, "Yes."

"Who..."

"But you should talk to Bill instead. He lost his brother a few years ago. Psycho murderer came by." Richie said. When he saw a flash of panic in Nancy's eyes, he said, "But don't worry! Your brother'll be fine, I'm sure. He's... he sounds strong."

"He is." Nancy sighed. "But, I dunno... with the horror stories I've heard from the Lab, I don't know... I don't know what's happening to him, or..."

"Hey, it'll be okay!" Richie grinned. "You'll get him out, and then he'll be okay. You guys can do sibling stuff, like... like you could go to the park, or fight over the TV remote..."

Nancy laughed. "We do fight over movies quite a bit."

"And you can sing off-key and curse each other out when your parents aren't looking," Richie continued, "And he can dunk maple syrup on your eggs, and you can throw them in-"

Nancy froze. "How did you know that Mike likes maple syrup on his eggs?"

There was a beat, before Richie said, "I, uh, I didn't. I like it, though.

It's probably... probably a doppelganger thing, right?"

When Nancy kept staring at him, he said, "Hey, kinda weird. Anyway, I'm gonna... gonna go see if the Losers need me. Catch ya later!"

He held out his hand, sending a few sparks into the air as a goodbye, and then he rushed away.

17. Forcefields Don't Solve Everything

Notes for the Chapter:

- 1) Sorry this is late! My little sis wanted to go see Black Panther and I lost track of what time we'd be back.
- 2) MAJOR Trigger Warning for this chapter: Lots of electrocution, violence and a panic attack.
- 3) Next week's updates may be a little... odd. I'm going on a 9-day vacation and while I WILL update every day, it may not be at the usual time- it will either be really early or late.

Thanks! Love y'all! :D

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Forcefields Don't Solve Everything

The only thing Mike could think of to comfort himself was, *They can't have been caught. The Doctors would have gloated. I would have heard them screaming. They can't have been caught.*

He heard nothing about the kids in the woods for most of the day, which must have meant they'd gotten away. The Lab tested his forcefield by throwing things and *shooting* things at it, and Mike got the general impression that they wouldn't care if his shield failed and a bullet went right into his chest. And then he was thrown into a room- not solitary this time, so he got to sleep on a bed, though it wasn't much more comfortable than the floor. It was a bit warmer, though, but that still didn't prevent him from waking up sore.

Mike did awaken a little bit before they came to collect him, so he just curled up, staring at the ceiling. He didn't want to look at himself, didn't want to look at the bruises and scars forming across his skin. He just bit his lip, staring up and trying not to cry. He knew

there was a camera in the corner, knew that they'd be able to tell if he cried...

His main thought, though, wasn't about himself. He was thinking about El.

She went through this every day for twelve years.

Twelve years.

No wonder she never talks about it.

Mike shuddered, thinking about having to go through this with no hope of escape, no knowledge that somebody could help him. He wondered how long Kali had been here- she'd always been vague, but he wondered if she'd been there for longer or shorter than El. Probably shorter, because she had to form her gang, right?

He wondered if Nancy had been in the Lab- *was* in the Lab. If she was, wouldn't Brenner use her against him instead of Eddie? She was closer to him. Unless she hadn't been caught- but the Doctors had gone after her, wouldn't she have been caught? And if she had been caught, and escaped... had she not looked for him?

Don't think like that. Mike reminded himself. *This won't last. They'll come and destroy this place, and I'll see El again and I can hug her and kiss her and tell her how sorry I am that this happened to her. And I can talk to Nancy, and we can figure out what happened during the accident. And everything will be okay. Everything will be okay.*

After a few minutes, guards came and dragged him out. Mike didn't bother to ask where they were going, instead focusing on the walls. He was trying to memorize the pattern down the halls, tried to picture the Lab's structure in his head, but he just *couldn't* remember all the twists and turns.

In the new room, he had wires strapped to his head again, but he wasn't forced into a chair, instead standing in one room while the wires went somewhere into the wall. He doubted he could move very far, not that he tried. Two Guards stood by the door, watching him. Mike had a feeling that, very soon, they'd do more than watch.

Up ahead was the glass window, and behind it, several scientists and doctors were buzzing around, passing papers and clipboards as Mike waited, wondering what exactly would happen if something that was tossed against his forcefield rebounded and hit the glass.

He'd probably be fine, he thought. His panic attacks had been getting less frequent, and the only one he'd had here was because of the wolf, but... well, he was under a hell of a lot more stress now than in any other time in the past four years. If his PTSD hadn't acted up yet, it was only a matter of time-

*Don't think about that don't think about that don't think about that
DON'T THINK ABOUT THAT...*

He heard one voice from behind the glass. "Okay. Now summon a forcefield."

Mike sighed, lifting his arms to see the barrier of light surrounding him, noticing that, with some disappointment, the light did not cut through the wires.

"Alright. Let's begin."

One of the Guards by the door drew a gun and fired. Mike flinched, but kept his shield off, watching the bullet bounce off. The other Guard started shooting, too, and behind the glass, the Scientists were watching some sort of screen, probably reading his brainwaves or some shit.

And after the bullets, came matches and fire- all bouncing off, all extinguished quickly. Mike started to wish that the fire wouldn't get stomped out, that water wouldn't be thrown on it, that it would light the Lab on fire and let it burn.

And then after the fire was heavier objects, thrown his way, as he kept his hands up, starting to close his eyes so that he could focus on keeping the shield up. He tried as hard as he could not to look like he was straining under the weight of everything that had hit the forcefield. He hated the idea that the Lab knew how much pressure they were putting on him, because he knew they wouldn't care. They wouldn't stop the tests, or help him, or let him rest. If anything,

they'd put more pressure on him. Make it harder.

"Are you done yet?" he finally asked, as the final item fell to the floor.

"Not yet." one of the Scientists said. "We have one more test for you."

Mike bit back another sarcastic response, and turned to the Guards, waiting.

And then one pulled out the cattle prod.

And Mike dropped the Shield.

He stepped back, not caring now that horror was filling his face. The guards paused, and behind the glass, the scientists whispered to each other. Finally, one of them signaled to a guard, and he said, "Put the forcefield back up."

"No." Mike shook his head.

"What?"

"I know what that does." Mike said, staring at the cattle prod with a growing terror. "It's so much worse if it hits the forcefield."

"And we want to know exactly what it reads like. Put the forcefield up."

"No, no."

The Guard let out a sigh. "Damn it, we thought you were going to be more agreeable, kid. Do we have to bring in one of the other kids to-"

"No!" Mike yelled.

"Then put up the Shield."

"The..." Mike stumbled, glancing around the room as he felt his chest start to tighten. "The wires. The wires'll spark and probably set something on fire-"

"They won't. Put up the fucking forcefield, or we'll stop asking so nicely."

Mike hesitated, and then lifted the forcefield, seeing the Guards now through flickers of light. He stared, feeling his panic start to rise through him, as the Guard approached.

And then the Guard raised the Cattle Prod to the forcefield, and suddenly, Mike wasn't thinking anymore. Reacting on instinct, Mike dropped the shield, letting the electricity spark into the air, as he ducked, threw out his hands, and watched as his light beams sent the Guard flying.

There was a long silence as Mike stared, horrified. He dropped his hands, backing up as far as he could, no longer able to hide the fear that was overtaking him.

Not that the Guards cared.

The second that the first Soldier got back to his feet, they were both on Mike, and he felt himself thrown to the floor, the wires ripped from his head. He screeched as he received a kick to the stomach, and he started yelling, without thinking, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" They still didn't care, and after a second, Mike felt the Cattle Prod jammed into his side. He screamed as electricity coursed through his body again, feeling every sore muscle start to burn, feeling like he was *on fire again*.

When his mind once again returned to the room, he realized that he had curled up, and was audibly sobbing.

The first Guard said, "Now, let's try this again."

Mike shook his head, and then he was hit again.

Ben could hear Mike screaming from his room.

He hadn't been brought away for testing that day; he'd received his food, so it wasn't as if they'd forgotten him. And once he heard the Wheeler kid screaming, he thought he knew why. Someone newer,

someone more interesting, was being tested. Ben wondered what that meant for the other Losers. If the Lab decided they weren't to be tested anymore... well, that couldn't be good, could it?

Ben was sitting against his door, waiting, when he heard talking in the hall. He strained to listen, and then froze, realizing that one of the men talking was the man in charge- what had Mike called him? Brenner?

"He's apparently still resisting." he said, and Ben shivered at his voice. He'd heard that voice plenty of times, *ordering* him to do things, to use his powers until he passed out, to go as far as he dared with his energy manipulation.

"Should we bring one of the others in again?"

"No. This resistance seems to be less... spiteful. At least we know we've instilled fear in him. That can be used."

"He probably knows we failed to capture the others."

"Which is unfortunate, but there will be other chances, especially if they're here for him."

"But he-"

"Don't worry." Brenner was almost past the door now, and Ben could only barely hear the last words. "Once everything's ready, we'll break him completely."

Ben froze over, and then he slid to the ground, staring at the wall.

Break him completely.

Ben wondered what it would take to break Mike, but he doubted it could be good. He barely knew the kid, but he wanted desperately to get him out, to save him from whatever was happening to him.

And then he had a worse thought.

He wondered if the Lab thought they'd already broken the rest of them.

Mike wasn't sure how he was still conscious.

He lost count of how many kicks, how many punches, how many slaps he'd taken, and at this point he was too tired to figure out if he'd been electrocuted more than twice already. He was still on the ground, and his hands had moved to his neck, covering himself as best he could to prevent further injury. He was still sobbing, still screaming, when he heard, distantly, a door open and close. After a minute, he was raised slightly, the violence stopping for a few seconds, and he saw Brenner come into view.

Mike didn't even have the energy to glare at him, to let his hate project into his gaze. Instead, he simply stared, still crying, his terror starting to build.

Then Brenner nodded, and Mike was dropped to the ground again.

But before he could be hit again, before he could be kicked again, before he could even be electrocuted again, he heard a sound.

He wasn't sure where the sound had come from; were there speakers in the Lab? Or had Brenner resorted to destroying something to get Mike's reaction? Or... no, he couldn't be imagining it, could he?

But, as Mike fell to the ground, he heard it. It was loud, *so loud*, as if it was pounding in his ears, *exploding* in his mind.

He heard glass shattering.

It took him a second to process, and then he started screeching, panic completely overtaking him, as he moved his hands to cover his ears. Vaguely, he remembered *you have to get somewhere safe, calm down, remind yourself where you are...*

But that was when he was kicked again, and again, and the seconds-or minutes?- felt like hours, as he kept panicking, kept screaming, kept feeling pain on all sides, couldn't tell what was real and what wasn't, and he could vaguely feel the metal, and then...

Then he was on fire again.

He was on fire, and Nancy was screaming, and he was screaming, and he was on fire. He was on fire and Nancy was calling for him, screaming, “Mike! Mike! MIKE!” and...

And...

The last thought he had before he passed out was, in an almost detached way,

Nancy almost sounds like El.

Notes for the Chapter:

Tomorrow: El Hopper Raises Hell

18. El Hopper Raises Hell

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

El Hopper Raises Hell

Bill and Mike awoke first of everyone the next morning.

They sat in the corner, and Mike said, “How’s your leg?”

“Better.” Bill shrugged. “I think I m-might be able to walk.”

“That’s good.” Mike was silent for a second, before saying, “If you don’t think you’d be able to break in-”

Bill shook his head. “I h-h-have to. For Stan. And Eddie, and Ben.”

“Well, you can’t help them much if you can’t walk.”

“I’ll be f-f-fine. And if I get into tr-trouble, we can have M-Max run me out.”

“Can’t rely on that.” Mike said. After a second, though, he added, “But transforming is awesome, isn’t it?”

Bill smiled, nodding. “Yeah. That felt... amazing.”

“Maybe after this is over,” Mike shrugged, “We can show the others how to do it.”

“Do you think Stan c-could? His powers don’t allow a lot of ch-channeling.”

“He can probably do something with his talons or wings or something. Lucas said that it didn’t need to be channeled through the hands. Ben could probably get it super easy, and Eddie... well, he will try until he gets it or he dies.”

Bill laughed. “He *would*. And he’ll fl-flip off anyone who tells him he

can't."

"If he doesn't beat the shit out of them."

They smiled at each other, and then Bill said, "Wh-wh-wh-when we get them out... we're g-getting out of this f-fucking town."

"That'll be so nice." Mike sighed, looking up at the ceiling. "I can't wait to leave this place. Everybody here is a piece of shit. I'll have to leave my grandparents a note, though, let them know I'm safe."

"My p-parents won't care." Bill shrugged. "But we'll have to t-tell Stan's parents and Ben's Mom."

"And Richie's parents."

Bill silently nodded, turning away slightly.

After a second, Mike said, "Hey, Bill?"

"What?"

"I... I don't regret it."

"R-regret what?"

"Showing you guys my powers. Learning with you guys. Being your... your friend. Even if it means I can't come back... I don't regret any of it."

Bill paused, before turning around and saying, "I don't regret anything, either."

They smiled, and then they saw someone sit up out of the corner of their eyes, and they turned to see El climb out of her sleeping bag. She glanced towards the boys, and said, "Who else is awake?"

"So, what are we doing?" Nancy asked, crossing her arms.

They'd woken up everyone and sat in a circle. The Losers glanced at each other, and Bill said, "W-Well, we came up with this pr-protocol

in case of at-attack. We should stay for about th-three days, and then-”

“Three *days?*” El shouted, looking horrified. Everyone jumped, turning to her, as she said, “We can’t wait that long! Mike’s already been in there forever!”

“And if the Lab knows we’re here, they’ll be on the lookout for us.” Bev said.

“If we *wait*,” El said, “They’ll have more time to prepare for us.”

“Unless they think we left.” Steve said.

“They *won’t*.” El said. “Especially since they know I was there. They’ll know we’re here for Mike. What if they move him? What if-”

“El.” Nancy said, putting a hand to her shoulder. “We get it. We want to find Mike just as much as you do. But we *can’t* just run off to the Lab when they’re actively looking for us. Give them a few days to let their guard down.”

El huffed, but stopped talking. Kali glanced at her worriedly as Bill and Hanlon started to go over more safety protocols- there had to be complete silence if somebody was upstairs, they had to how to ration food, all that sort of stuff. As everyone kept talking, El moved towards the corner, sitting down. She was just pulling off her jacket as Kali herself moved over from the group, sitting in front of her.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Finding Mike.” El said.

“I thought you said your tracking wasn’t working.”

“I don’t need to *track* him.” she said bitterly. “I *know* where he is. I just... I want to see him.”

They paused, and then Kali said, “How can I help?”

“Make all the noise stop.” El said, as she wrapped her jacket sleeves around her eyes in a makeshift blindfold.

Kali shut her eyes, and then suddenly, El was alone in the basement.

“Thanks,” she said, knowing that even though she couldn’t see or hear her, her sister was still in front of her. And she was definitely happy that she wouldn’t have to filter out the noise around her in order to desensitize herself.

So she let the sleeves cover her eyes, and she sat down, and slipped into the void.

She was in the blackness and silence for a good few moments, getting re-used to her surroundings. She stared at the darkness, breathing slowly as she looked around the Void, thinking, *Find Mike. Find Mike. FIND MIKE.*

And then she heard a loud, piercing shriek.

El whipped around, her hair flying, as she turned, scanning the blackness. “Mike?” she yelled, horrified, barely even able to hear herself over his screams- *his* screams.

She finally saw a shape on the ground, and she rushed forwards, stopping just short of him- she knew from experience that she couldn’t touch anything in the Void, and she didn’t want to lose him just yet. However, as she dropped to her knees, getting closer to him, she felt horror clench in her stomach.

She’d never seen Mike look so *awful*. He had bruises and burns splattered across his arms and face, and his eyes were red. What made El’s horror worse was the fact that he’d been changed into a hospital gown, exactly the same kind of gown that El had been forced to wear throughout her childhood. And it wasn’t just his appearance that was terrifying her. He was sobbing and screaming, curled in on himself, trying to protect himself from harm. And after a second, El realized that his terror might not just be out of whatever was happening to him. He was completely shaking, his breath was ragged, and he was moving to clutch his stomach. She recognized that, she *knew* his body language, especially *this* body language, she’d learned to watch out for it, just in case. He was having a panic attack.

And then he flinched, and started screaming more, and El realized that he was also being attacked.

They were attacking him during a flashback.

“Mike!” she screamed. “Mike! *Mike!* MIKE!”

He just kept screaming and screaming, and El felt like her heart was being ripped from her chest. “*Mike!*”

She heard a voice from far away, but she couldn’t make out the words over the screaming. “Mike, we’re coming for you! We’re coming!” she yelled. “We’re going to save you, please hold on! *Mike!*”

And then she felt herself getting ripped from the void, as Mike disappeared before her eyes.

“El! *El!*”

El ripped the jacket sleeves out of her eyes, throwing the clothing to the ground as she yelled, “What the *fuck* do you want?”

She looked up to see everyone jump, glancing at each other. Kali was standing off to the side, looking apologetic. It took El only a second to figure out that she must have been screaming out loud, and attracted everyone’s attention.

Well, shit.

“El, what happened?” Dustin asked.

“We just heard you yelling for Mike.” Max said, looking very worried.

“What’s going on?” Richie asked, looking incredibly confused.

“We need to get to Mike *now!*” El said, jumping to her feet.

She heard a cacophony of “What?”’s and “We just said”’s and “El, wait”’s, but she didn’t care; she simply jumped up and started screaming. “They’re torturing him! They’re hurting him, they’re going

to fucking *kill him* if we don't get to him! We need to find him!"

"El!" Nancy said, running up and grabbing her by the shoulder, trying to calm her down. "El—"

"El," Bev said, shouting in a bit of a panic, "El, we have to stay hidden until—"

"I don't *care!*!" El screeched, and suddenly, as she cocked her head, the trapdoor flew open above their heads. As everyone jumped at the noise, El threw out her hand, and Nancy was tossed against the wall. El pushed her way through the crowd, leapt out the trapdoor, and disappeared.

She figured out quickly that she couldn't just walk into the Lab by herself. No, she'd need more explosives. So El stumbled into town, hoping she didn't look too noticeable, and started down the street, glancing at storefronts, trying to find the store Jonathan had gone to. She could probably remember the ingredients if she tried hard enough, and she probably didn't need that many...

She turned a corner, seeing a blonde girl walking down the street, talking into her phone. She didn't look very *nice*, but El hadn't seen anybody else her age walking down the street, so she might as well ask her for directions.

"Excuse me?" El asked, trying to keep her voice calm.

The girl glanced at her, looking very annoyed. "Ugh, sorry, Sally, some kid's talking to me." she said, and then she put the phone down. "What?"

"Where's the store?"

"The store?"

"Where you buy things."

The girl groaned. "Listen, kid, there are stores *everywhere*. You're gonna have to be more specific."

El wasn't great at social situations, but she did know that *the store where you build bombs* probably wasn't the best thing to say. She tried to think of which ingredient wouldn't sound suspicious, but as she was pausing, the girl narrowed her eyes. "Where are you from?" she asked.

El blinked. "Indiana."

"What are you doing *here*?"

"Finding my friend."

The girl stared at her. "Your-"

"*Jane!*"

El groaned as she felt Kali's hand on her shoulder, dragging her back a little. "Sorry, sweetheart." Kali said to the girl, a fake smile on her face. "She got lost."

"Did *not*." El sighed.

"Yes, you did." Kali said. "We'll just be going back to the car now, Jane, come *on*."

El walked away, trying not to notice the girl's glare on the back of her head, as her and Kali turned the corner.

"Alright, what the *fuck*?" Kali asked the second the girl was out of eyeshot.

El threw Kali's hand off of her shoulder, crossing her arms and glaring at her. "I'm finding Mike." she said.

"Jane, listen to me for two fucking seconds." Kali groaned. "I hate them, too. I hate them and I can only imagine what they're doing to-"

"I don't *have* to imagine it, Kal!" El said, her voice getting a bit too loud. "I don't have to *imagine it* because I *saw it* ! He was having a panic attack and they were still torturing him!" Tears sprung to her eyes, as she said, "He's being *hurt* and we're just sitting around doing *nothing*!"

“Jane, Jane, please...” Kali said, quieting her for a minute. “I understand. I don’t want him to get hurt, either. And I don’t want to stay in one place, stay *hiding*; I *hate* that, and if it were up to me, I would be going right with you. But we’re in some serious shit. We can’t just march up to the Lab and demand him returned to us. And you’re not going to take them down single-handedly. I don’t want to wait either, but we’re going to have to. The others aren’t going to barge into the Lab if they think they can’t win, so, unfortunately, we have to wait on them.

“And Mike’s not going to die. They won’t kill him because they want to study him. The only siblings we had who died were killed on accident, and the Lab’s not foolish enough to torture a kid to death when they can learn more from him, especially since I can’t imagine Mike giving them information on his powers. And... and if they’re using him as bait to catch us, they won’t lose him so easily.”

El looked up at her sister, still distressed, as Kali continued, “Listen. Soon as we get in there, we can murder everyone who laid a finger on him. Sister Bonding time, right?”

After a second, El glanced at the ground, and said, “I’d rather not kill anyone.”

“We’ll just brutally maul them, then.”

“Kal.”

Kali sighed, holding out her hand. “Let’s go back, and calm down. Tell the others what you saw, and we’ll make a decision then.”

El nodded, and then the two sisters walked off.

They were almost out of town when El stopped, looking towards a telephone pole. Four Missing Posters were plastered on it, and she approached, scanning them.

“Yeah, it’s them.” Kali said, glancing awkwardly towards El. “Remember, we’re not supposed to react-”

“There aren’t enough.” El said quietly.

“What?”

“Posters.” El said. “There aren’t enough posters. Only four.”

“Yeah, Bev and- what’s his name? Eddie? They’ve been on the run for longer. Old news.” Kali said.

El shook her head. “Then there should be five.”

She scanned the posters again. She spotted two faces she didn’t recognize- that would be the other two in the Lab, Stan and Ben. She focused on the other two, and it clicked very fast who was missing.

“There isn’t a poster for Richie.”

19. Nancy probably should have revealed this Information before Now

Notes for the Chapter:

As I mentioned earlier, starting tomorrow, a lot of the updates will have a less set time, but I will still try to update daily. Just letting you know why everything might be a bit off. Thanks! :D

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Nancy probably should have revealed this Information before Now

“El!” Nancy sighed, relieved, as El and Kali jumped into the hidden room. “Thank God!”

El glanced around at everyone; they all were staring at her warily. Kali came to her rescue, saying, “Alright, show’s over. Everyone put stuff away, we have to talk.”

As everyone clambered over each other, putting books and food back into places, El walked over to Richie. He was standing in the corner, fiddling with his shirt. She stared at him, and then said, “You don’t have a poster.”

“What?” he asked, confused.

“A Missing Poster. Everyone has one but you. Why?”

Richie continued staring, before biting his lip and saying, “Well, uh... my... my parents don’t really... know I’m gone?”

“You’ve been gone for weeks.”

“Yeah, well... haven’t seen them in a bit longer.” Richie shrugged. “Off having fun without their son, you know?”

El shook her head. “I don’t-”

“Well, they don’t care about me.” Richie shrugged. “Wouldn’t notice if I ran away for years. You know...”

El was about to respond, when she heard a “Jane?”, and El turned towards the rest of the room, as Kali had called.

The others had all managed to gather together, and as El and Richie turned towards them, Nancy said, in a voice that gave away a bit of her worry, “El, what... what happened?”

El paused, before glancing at the ground and saying, “I... I wanted to see Mike.”

“What does that m-mean?” Bill asked.

“El can see people in the Void.” Steve said.

“The void?” Bev asked.

“She can enter, like, a sub-reality, and track people.” Dustin explained.

“A-” Bill paused.

“What did you see?” Nancy interrupted.

El hesitated, before saying, “He was... hurt. He was *so hurt*, he was having a panic attack and he just kept *screaming*, I... I think they were still hurting him.”

They all stared at her, still horrified, and then Lucas said, just loud enough for them to hear, “Shit, if you’d told us that, I’d have stormed out with you.”

They were silent for a second, and then Nancy said, “I... I need to tell you guys something.”

They turned to her, and she slowly sat down on top of the box of first-aid stuff. She turned to the Party, saying, “Do... do you remember when the Lab shut down? The day it officially moved out of town?”

“Day Three-Hundred and Fifty-Three.” El said.

“We had a party.” Dustin said.

Nancy paused. “Well, uh, I went to check out the area that night. See if they left anything behind. And... and they did.”

“They did?” Steve asked; Jonathan jumped, too. Apparently she had not told them this information.

“It was... it was a file. A file on Mike.”

Everyone reacted by staring at her in horror, with two exceptions- Max glanced at the ground, a flicker of a memory coming to her mind- holding a paper of what looked like a young Mike, right before a ceiling collapsed in on them- but she’d completely forgotten that, assumed it was a pre-disaster hallucination. The other person was El, who instantly started yelling. “They had *what*? ”

After a half a second, Kali, Dustin and Lucas joined in the yelling. Once they’d all calmed down, Nancy said, “Listen, I didn’t think it was worth mentioning, I just thought...”

“What did it say?” Bill asked. They all turned to him, as he said quietly, “What did they know about him? It might be why they-”

“I don’t know.” Nancy said. “I don’t know, the writing was all faded away. But the photo... it was definitely him, from really soon after the Accident. I think... I think they knew what it did to him.”

“Why didn’t you mention this before?” Jonathan asked.

“I didn’t think it was important.” Nancy shrugged. “They were out of town for a while, and then when we were hunting them, I didn’t think they’d ever go back for him...”

“When was he in the Lab?” Kali asked, confused.

“I... I think the photo was taken after the accident, but...” Nancy paused. “That’s a whole other thing.”

“Well,” El said, stepping forwards and crossing her arms, “Now seems

like a good time to spill.”

Nancy hesitated, and then said, “Right before the... the Lab appeared and kidnapped Mike, we... we were talking- arguing- and... and we found out that we remember the Accident differently.”

“Accident?” Hanlon asked.

“What accident?” Bev asked.

Nancy flinched. “Mike and I got our powers from an accident. Someone had an underground experiment that we stumbled across and... well, that’s where our memories diverge. We hadn’t figured it out before then because we didn’t like to talk about it, and even when Mom made me go to therapy with him we didn’t talk about it, and if we’d just...”

“What do you mean,” Max asked, moving to sit on the floor by Nancy, “That you remember it differently?”

Nancy paused, struggling to get the words out. “I... *I* remember when the... the explosion happened, I remember Mike being right in front of me. I... I grabbed him and shielded him, and I remember the second I got my fire, I accidentally burned his shoulders. Nobody noticed because the explosion burned him as well, but I remember him *screaming*. He was right beneath me and he *screamed*, and... but...”

“But Mike touched the glass.” El finished, and Nancy nodded.

“The glass?” Hanlon asked.

“There was a glass inbetween the chemical experiment and Nancy and Mike.” Lucas explained. “Mike... well, a lot of Mike’s... problems came from the fact that he touched the glass right before the explosions, so he assumed that he’d caused it when it was probably just bad luck. But then he’d be too close to the glass for Nancy to grab...”

“And he was burned and stabbed by broken shards.” Nancy said. “I... I don’t remember *any* hitting me, except for maybe two or three, not nearly enough if I was nearer the glass than I remembered, so we

definitely weren't in the same place, and Mike remembers me being farther from the glass than him, but... but I *remember* it so *clearly*, I *remember* hearing him scream, feeling my fire burn into his skin... I couldn't have just *imagined* it!"

"Why do you remember the accident differently?" Kali asked.

"I don't *know!*" Nancy shouted. "I don't *fucking know!* And nothing makes any *goddamn sense!*"

"Do you think..." everyone turned to Steve, as he paused, thinking, "Do you think the Lab might've tampered with your memories?"

"What?"

"Well," Steve said, "If they could figure out how to fuck with memories, and they somehow failed in experimenting on Mike as a kid, and they wanted to dump him back without any questions, maybe they tried to do some shit to your family's memory and it ended up fucking up your memories of the Accident." He turned to Kali, saying, "Kal, did... was there ever another experiment who could erase memories?"

Kali shook her head. "If there was, they wiped me, too, because I don't remember. We had a super-strength girl, and a telepathic boy, and I remember them a little, and I don't remember *anything* about..."

"Well," Max said quietly, "I guess we'll have a few things to ask the Lab workers when we beat the shit out of them, huh?"

They stared at each other, and then Bill said, "Ri-Richie? Are you okay?"

El glanced over her shoulder, to see that Richie was staring into space. After a second, Richie laughed, saying, "It's... it's not important."

"What is it?" Bev asked, narrowing her eyes.

Richie hesitated, still forcing a smile, before he said, "It's... it's, you know... apparently I don't have a missing poster in town."

There was a pause, before Bev said, “Oh, Rich...” She looked about ready to move over, but Richie held up a hand.

“I’m fine, I just... think I wanna sit down a sec.”

As he moved to sit in the corner, Jonathan pulled his phone out of his pocket, having noticed it buzzing. His eyes widened, and he turned to El. “El,” he said, “How would you feel holding off the attack for just two days?”

El stared at him blankly. “Wha- two days? Why?”

“We can’t wait two days,” Max said sharply, “If they’re hurting Mike-”

“Yeah, but...” Jonathan glanced down at his phone, before looking back at her. “Well, we’ve got new information on the way, and I think it might be worth the wait.”

“New information?” Kali asked. “What are you talking about?”

“My Mom and Hopper are coming.”

20. Some Nice Bonding Moments

Notes for the Chapter:

MAJOR Trigger Warning for today's chapter for a referenced suicide attempt, in the third section of the chapter.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Some Nice Bonding Moments

“Are you packed?” Joyce asked, leaning against the wall and crossing her arms.

Hopper looked up and nodded; everything they needed was in two bags, which he’d dragged from his house and brought to the Castle. In the practice room, Erica glanced briefly up at them, before turning back to her parents, showing them another trick she’d figured out with her sparks.

“We should start out now.” Hopper said. “We can take turns driving—”

“We need to wait a bit, and you know that.” Joyce said quietly. “Erica’s friends said that the Lab’s watching the roads. However, one of them got a hold of some girl called Robin? She says she can get us out of town in the morning.”

“Why would she help us?”

“Either one of the kids bribed her, or she’s... like us and wants to help in whatever way she can.” Joyce shrugged.

“Can we trust her?”

“If not, you’re bulletproof and I’m invisible, we should be able to get out of a situation fast. I just would rather not, seeing as it would just make our roadtrip last longer.”

They paused, and then Jim said, “Remember our last road trip?”

“To fucking Ohio, I remember.” Joyce nodded. “I kept changing the station just to piss you off.”

“I almost crashed the car twice.”

“And you pulled the steering wheel from the car, we had to have Bob put it back...”

They trailed off after a second, glancing away. After a minute, Joyce said, “I think Bob would love them. The kids, I mean. He loved helping us. He’d probably make them new gadgets to use during missions, or something.” She paused, before saying, “When... when we destroy this Lab, you know it probably won’t be over, right? We’ll have to make sure all their bases are down, and...”

“We’ll do what we have to.” Hopper said. “We’ll do what we have to, so that they don’t get to the kids.”

And after a second, Joyce said, “I still miss Bob.” Hopper sent her a sympathetic look, and she said, “Let’s get back at the bastards that killed him, yeah?”

In the Hidden Room, Richie sat up, rubbing his eyes. “Hey?” he called. “Anyone else still awake?”

After a second, El sat up, nodding. Nancy moved, too, along with Bev, Kali and Steve. Richie glanced around, and then said, “So, your friends. They... they’re coming?”

“Jonathan’s Mom and Kali and El’s Dad, yeah.” Nancy said.

“Your Dad?” Bev asked hesitantly.

“Adoptive.” El said. “He took us in after we got out of the Lab.”

“Do... do your other parents know where you are?” Richie asked.

“Dustin and Max told Dustin’s Mom that they were going camping

with us.” Steve said. “My parents wouldn’t care where I am, Lucas’s parents are hiding with his sister, and... actually, Nancy, what did you tell your parents?”

“I was... taking Mike on a trip to the College.” Nancy said. “Told them that they had a program for younger siblings to visit for a few days and learn shit. Mom wanted to say goodbye but I told her we had to hurry because otherwise we’d miss orientation and Mike was already in the car with Will. I’m not sure what we’ll tell them when we get back, because I can guarantee that Mike won’t be... won’t be okay. Maybe we’ll tell them the truth then. If they... if they’re going to be mean to Mike about it, he could probably live with us.” She glanced towards Steve. “If you and Jonathan would be okay with that.”

“Oh, we would.” Steven said. “But no way in *hell* would Mike leave that town if he could still be doing superhero shit.”

“Well, I feel like he could probably use a break after all... this.” Nancy shrugged.

“If he wants to stay, I think Hop would probably take him in.” Kali said. “I could move back in with my Gang if he needs my room-”

“Yeah,” El said quietly, “There’s no way that Hop is going to let you run off with a gang just so that Mike can have his own room.”

“Why are we even talking about this?” Nancy asked quietly. “Chances are that we’ll just tell our parents that we had a nice time at College and never mention it again.”

“It’ll be hard to hide the bruises.” El said.

“The what?”

El flinched, before saying, “M-Mike’s bruises. And burns.”

Nancy’s eyes widened in horror, and she was silent for a very long time, struggling to find the words.

Finally, Bev said, “So, they’re, like... torturing him? *Really* torturing him?”

El bit her lip and nodded.

“Jesus.” Steve said, as everyone muttered something similar. “Hopefully the Chief and Ms. Byers get here early, we’ve gotta get him and the other kids the *fuck* out of there.”

Bev glanced at Richie worriedly, before Nancy finally said, “El?”

“Yeah?”

“They... did you say that they *burned* him?”

Once Nancy said that, all of the Hawkins Party members froze, some dark realization happening between them. Well, all but El, who simply stared at the ground and tried not to cry. “Well, it was... probably electrocution. But they might’ve... I mean, he *was* having a...”

Nancy let out a quiet cry, putting her hand over her mouth. Steve moved to hug her, and she managed to say, “Once we get him out of there, I’m killing everyone in the Lab.”

“Get in line.” Kali said.

There was a long silence, and Richie thought that maybe they were done talking, before Bev said, a bit too loudly, “Wait, Kali, you have a *gang*?”

There was a beat, and then Kali started laughing. Richie glanced at the others, and then after a second, Steve and Nancy were laughing, too, and then everyone who was awake was laughing.

It was nice, to forget for just a second the danger that all their friends were in. Just for a second.

Of course, come morning, much more problems would arise.

Stan glanced up as the door opened, eyes widening as Eddie was pushed in. The door slammed shut, and Eddie said, “Fucking hell!”

“Are you okay?” Stan asked, standing up. The two of them had been thrown into the gathering room again, and as Eddie scrambled to his feet, Stan rushed over, grabbing onto his shoulders.

Eddie groaned. “I hate this *fucking place!*”

“Not so loud, they’ll hear-”

“I don’t *care!*” Eddie screamed, pushing Stan away. “They know I hate this and I’m not gonna shut up about it! I *hate them* and I *hate this hellhole-*”

“Eddie, please-”

“They’re not gonna be nice, Stan!” Eddie yelled. “They’re not gonna stop torturing us every day just because we do what they want! Have you been playing nice, Stan? Have they given you back your fucking wings because you haven’t gone out of your way to piss them off? Can you fly again? Can-”

“Stop it!” Stan yelled, backing up. “Eddie, *stop it!*”

“I’m not doing *shit* for them! They spend all day throwing whatever they can at me just to see how long it will take to kill me! They don’t give a *shit* if we live or not! So I don’t give a shit if they know how I think about them!”

“Eddie-!”

“Are you telling me that you can’t hear me screaming every fucking day?” Eddie asked, and Stan bit his lip, glancing to the ground. “Could you not hear *Wheeler* today? You wanna know why he was screaming? It’s my fault! It was my fucking fault! He said he’d do what they wanted if they didn’t fucking torture me in front of him! And now they’re doing whatever the *fuck* they want to him!”

“Eddie, listen, I don’t like it here any more than you do-”

“I’m going to *fucking kill them!* I’m gonna kill *all of them!*” Eddie screamed, before turning to the door, “Do you *hear me*? I’m going to rip you all apart!” He whipped back around towards Stan. “Why do you do what they say? Why don’t you and Ben *fight-?*”

“Eddie!”

Eddie finally turned, looking up at Stan so as to meet his eyes. Stan stared for a second, before he said, “I’m... I’m scared, too.” There was another pause, before Stan added, as quietly as he dared, “They can take my talons away whenever they want. They already took away my wings. I...”

He slowly moved to the wall, sliding to the ground and curling up, as Eddie continued to watch him. “You know I sliced up a guard, right?” Eddie slowly nodded. “Yeah, they were pissed at me for that. Did I... did they tell you why?”

“They were testing my talons again- they love having me shred things and claw things and shit. I was sure at some point they’d make me kill someone, or... or they’d give me back my wings, but only after I’d completely broken, or... well, I tried not to participate in an experiment once. Was sick of it. And they told me... they told me that if I didn’t, they’d let me grow my wings in, and then chop them off.”

Stan didn’t dare look at Eddie, didn’t want to know what he was thinking. “I don’t know what would happen if my wings were cut off, if I’d get new ones, or if they’d... if they’d... I panicked. I freaked out. I summoned my talons and sliced up the Guard, and when the others came in I broke past and ran and...”

“Stan...”

“The windows aren’t locked.” Stan said, almost blankly, as he reached up to wipe his arm across his eyes. Eddie let out a soft gasp, realizing what he meant. “The windows aren’t locked and we were on the eleventh floor. I told them I thought my wings would appear if I... if I jumped. I didn’t. I didn’t think that.”

“Stan...”

Eddie had moved closer, dropping to his knees in front of his friend, staring at him in shock and worry. Stan had told them that he’d had thoughts like that before, that he’d... and they’d tried to help, they did. But, well, *here* , in probably the most dangerous place in the

world...

Stan looked up at his friend, and then simply said, “I can’t lose my wings, Eddie.”

Eddie reached forwards and hugged Stan, and Stan started to cry.

“I’m sorry, Stan.” Eddie said quietly. “I’m sorry, and we *will* get out of here. I promise.”

“How?”

“I don’t know.” Eddie admitted. “But we’re not going to die *here*, Stan. We’re not going to let them win.”

After a second, Eddie said, “So, what’ve they got on your back?”

Stan flinched. “I’m not sure...”

“Can I...?”

Stan turned, and Eddie peeled back part of the hospital gown. “Oh, shit, that looks kinda like a harness.” he said.

“Well, that’s certainly wonderful.”

After a second, Eddie moved over, leaning to be very close to Stan’s ear. Then, he whispered, as quietly as possible, “I think it would be easy to cut off, if I could get a knife.”

“Then we’d just have a way out.” Stan responded, just as quietly.

“We’ll wait until we’re all together?”

“Might be hard.”

“Then we’ll just have to be able to fight, instead of find them.”

“I can shield you, and then Wheeler can shield us. Could you carry three at once?”

“If you guys got in some kind of bin, I could probably lift it for just long enough to get us to the ground.”

“If we empty the toy chest?”

Stan paused. “Might work.”

“So, we just need something very, very sharp, and a lot of time.”

Stan glanced at his friend, smiling a little. “Guess we’ve got a plan.”

“We’ll be out of here before you know it.” Eddie smiled. “And then you can fly all you want.”

Notes for the Chapter:

Hope y'all enjoyed that, because things go OFF THE RAILS INSANE tomorrow and I hope you all are prepared for it!

Hint: We might be getting some Richie Answers soon... XD

21. And Everything Goes Downhill

Notes for the Chapter:

ooooh i cannot WAIT to see your reactions to this one

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

And Everything Goes Downhill

“I mostly try to imagine that day at the Quarry.” Bill explained, letting the bright energy flow around his hands. “You know? When Bev jumped off first? Or when we built the Underground Clubhouse, or beat the shit outta the Bowers Gang in a rock war. Or that time we went to Mike’s farm and got lost in the field.”

The Losers had decided that, while they waited, they should show off their powers and explain them a little. Hanlon had already shown off his powers, and how they differed from Will’s white-absorption; while Will only made ice, Hanlon could also control snow and, on occasion, cold winds. Bev had simply informed them that she used bad memories to kickstart her powers, though she declined on telling them *which* memories she used, and none of them were rude enough to ask.

The only one who wasn’t watching was El; she and Kali were in the corner, and El had decided to check on Mike again. After she’d informed them of this, Bev had shown her a picture of all of the Losers together, and asked her to check up on Stan, Eddie and Ben, as well. She was mostly silent as she explored the Void, but every now and again she’d whisper something, and they’d glance her way before continuing, trusting that she’d eventually tell them what she saw.

“Oh, yeah, that was fun.” Richie laughed. “We were out there for hours. Ben was the one who got us out.”

“Still don’t know why *Mike* couldn’t have found his way out of his

own *literal* backyard.” Bev joked.

Hanlon rolled his eyes. “Come on, Bev, that wouldn’t have been nearly as fun.”

“What about you, Richie?” Nancy asked, and Richie jumped. “How does your mimicry work?”

“Uh... w-well...” Richie said, as everyone looked at him. “Well, yeah, uh, when I touch someone with powers, I gain their abilities. I have it for... about an hour? But there’s kind of a... catch. See, I don’t tire as easily as the original power user- at *first*.”

“At first?” Jonathan asked.

Richie nodded. “See, the overuse of powers does have an effect, definitely. But if I use them at *all*, by the time the hour is up, I am *exhausted*. Sometimes I can prevent it, if, before the hour’s up, I touch someone else, and then the first power is replaced by the new guy’s, and the end gets delayed a bit. But, well, eventually I have to stop, and... it’s not fun. I’ve passed out more times than everyone else *combined*.”

“Why does the power overuse affect you like that?” Will asked.

Richie took a quick, almost unnoticeable second to glance in a panic at Bill, who simply stared at him, before saying, “Dunno. Just how it works.”

The only one who caught this glance was Nancy, who simply stared at Richie for a minute. Before she could think to say anything, however, El stood up, ripping her makeshift blindfold off. They all turned to look at her, as Kali asked, “So... how was it?”

El didn’t meet their eyes, but she said, “Ben seems fine. He was asleep. Stan was... he looked scared, but he couldn’t hear me. But he wasn’t very hurt. Eddie was... Eddie was okay, I think, but he seemed very worried. And... well, Mike was... wasn’t crying. Or getting hurt. But he didn’t look happy. He...”

At that moment, they heard a crash from the house above.

They all froze, staring at each other.

“O-Okay.” Bill said, staring up. “Okay, just s-stay here, and be quiet, we’ll-”

“Fuck that.” El said, before pushing past the rest of them and grabbing onto the trapdoor.

“El, no!” Bev yelled, reaching out and grabbing her arm. “We don’t know who’s out there!”

“If it’s the Lab,” El said simply, “I’ll fight them.”

“We don’t know how many there are!”

“So we stay trapped here?”

“We stay *hidden* here!”

“I *said*,” El said darkly, before suddenly, Bev was thrown off of her, flying right into Jonathan and Nancy, “*Fuck that!*” And she jumped out of the trapdoor.

After a second, Kali rushed after her, followed by Lucas and Dustin. The others glanced to each other, and then Nancy said, “Well, let’s go!” And then she raced off after the girl.

“Jane!”

El didn’t bother waiting, she just rushed up the stairs, following the sound of a second crash. She burst into the front room, instantly throwing out her hands and watching as a person flew across the floor, landing against the wall. Just as El rushed in, preparing to strike again, she froze.

“Shit.” she muttered, upon realizing that she hadn’t hit anyone from the Lab.

Kali, Lucas and Dustin rushed in, each dropping their fighting stance. “Who the hell is *this*?” Lucas asked, as Dustin paled.

The girl stood up, looking up at the kids with anger and disgust on her face. “Who the *fuck* do you think you are?” she asked.

“What are you doing here?” El asked, trying to make herself look as threatening as was possible.

The girl’s eyes flickered to Dustin, and she seemed to recognize him; at that instant, the others rushed in, hands out and prepared to fight. They all stared ahead, as Nancy said, “El, what’s going on?”

As they all slowly noticed the girl, El heard Bev let out a horrified gasp, and she glanced towards the redhead to see her step back, shocked.

“*Gretta?*”

The blonde girl stared at her, a dark smirk spreading across her face. “Well,” she said, crossing her arms, “If it isn’t Beaver-ly Marsh.”

Instantly, Bill moved himself in front of Bev, throwing out an arm. “Leave her alone.” he said, as Mike Hanlon and Richie both moved slightly closer to their friend, too.

“And the rest of the Loser Squad.” Gretta continued. “Are you all hiding out here? What’s...” her eyes widened, and flickered to El. “Oh.” she said, her smile getting bigger. “Oh, you’re *powered!*”

“*Gretta-*” Bev began.

Gretta’s gaze flickered from Will to Dustin to El to Kali. “And you’re powered, too. That’s why you’re in town. It’s a freak convention.”

“*Gretta, please!*” Bev said, panic growing in her eyes.

“God, everyone in town’s going to *love* this!” Gretta said, eyes glittering in a way that El didn’t like. “The Slut we drove out of town is back, and she’s hiding the other missing children, and they’re all powered freaks on the run from the government!”

“*Gretta, please, this is important!*” Bev said, panic rising in her voice as she peered around Bill, who was glaring daggers at the blonde girl. “You *can’t* tell anyone where we are, we *can’t* be found out! This is

life or death, Gretta-”

“Do you think I give a shit about freaks like you?” Gretta asked, letting out a mocking laugh.

Bev started forwards, but Jonathan was the one to hold her back, saying, “No!” Gretta turned to go, there, starting a run, as Jonathan said, “We can’t *hurt* her!”

“She’s going to reveal us!” Bev screamed, panic gripping her chest. “She’s gonna tell everyone where we are! We have to keep her here!”

“We can’t just kidnap her, the people in town will notice she’s missing.” Dustin said. “And if we hurt her-”

“We’re the bad guys.” Lucas said.

“It’s self-defense!” Bev argued.

El turned around, facing the place where Gretta had been; she must have already gotten out of the house. She started forwards, about to go after her, maybe talk some sense into the teen.

That was when Bev screamed, “Richie, *what are you doing?*”

El turned, to see that Richie pushed himself through the crowd of people, almost launching himself at Max. He grabbed her shoulder, and the second his eyes flashed dark blue, he raced away, entering into speedmode and rushing out the door in a dark blur.

They stared after him, and in a second, Richie had returned, dragging Gretta with him. He stopped and threw her away from him as she threw up; El noticed somewhere in the back of her head that Richie had not, but that didn’t seem important right now.

“What the *fuck*?” Gretta screeched, moving to go again.

That was when Richie shut his eyes tight, clearly bracing himself, before he yelled, “Bill, *hold her down!*”

El looked quickly to Bill, who was still standing slightly in front of Bev. He paused just for a second, asking Richie with his eyes *are you*

sure? before throwing out his hands, letting a cloud of white energy surround Gretta, dragging her to a chair and sitting her down as she started cursing.

“Richie, what the *fuck* are you doing?” Nancy asked, as everyone else started yelling similar things. Everyone but El, who fell silent and simply stepped closer, watching.

Richie moved closer to Gretta, kneeling down to get eye-level with her. She turned around, glaring at him, opening her mouth to scream something.

And then Richie’s eyes clouded, turning a faint white, as soon as Gretta made eye-contact. Everyone but Bill jumped, screaming something, as the two kept staring. El glanced to Bill, but he just looked... *resigned*.

“Richie, what the *fuck*-” Hanlon began.

“Holy shit, whose power *is* that?” Bev asked.

At that moment, Richie pulled away, his eyes un-clouding. He gripped onto Gretta’s arm, and then he raced away again.

They all stared at each other, before Nancy said, in an oddly upset tone, “What the *fuck* just happened?”

“Yeah!” Steve said, turning towards the Losers. “What the *fuck* was that?”

“Don’t look at us!” Hanlon said, as everybody did so. “He’s never done... done *that* before!”

El slowly turned to the Losers’ leader. “Bill?”

Bill glanced between everyone. “I... uh...”

“Bill?” Bev asked, shocked.

That was when Richie ran back in, managing to close the door behind him. He noticed everyone’s stares and said awkwardly, “Wow, Max, you weren’t kidding, speedmode really *is* really fucking cool!”

As everyone continued staring, he clapped his hands together and said, “Yeah, uh, problem’s solved! Let’s go back to the hideout to wait for your parents and shit-”

“What the *fuck* did you do?” Nancy asked.

Richie flinched, glancing to the ground. “Saved our skins. You know.”

“How? What did you *do* to her?” Kali asked, shocked.

“Dropped her off at home.”

“To tell her Dad what she found?” Bev asked.

“She won’t.” Richie replied, glancing away.

“And why not?” Hanlon asked.

Bill suddenly blurted, “Because he wiped her memory!”

There was a pause, as Richie slowly turned towards Bill, a crestfallen look on his face. Bill stared at him, and then said, “I’m s-sorry, Rich.”

“Sorry, Richie did *what?*” Bev asked.

“Nothing-”

“You wiped her *memory?*” Will asked.

“I...” Richie said.

“Whose power is *that?*” Steve asked.

“It’s his!” Bill said, earning another stare from Richie.

“He’s got... two powers?” El asked. “How-”

“It’s not important-“ Richie began.

“Not *important?*” Nancy asked, fury rising. “This seems like *useful information!*”

“I wouldn’t be able to wipe very many at once, we wouldn’t be able

to—" Richie said.

"You kept an *entire power* hidden!" Nancy shouted. "What else are you hiding?"

"That's need-to-know!"

"And we need to know *everything!*" El was starting to get nervous at just how angry Nancy looked.

"Nance, you hid *your* powers from us." Lucas said.

"Not while Mike was *being tortured in a Lab!*" Nancy turned on him, her eyes flashing a threatening orange as a few sparks dropped from her hands. "Not while I was allying with you to save him! Not when we're throwing ourselves into danger with kids I *barely know!*"

As soon as she finished that sentence, Richie's quiet fear disappeared, replaced by a quick look of shock, and then *fury*. "My power mimicry is *more useful!*" Richie shouted. "I don't need to tell anyone about powers I don't use!"

"You just *used them!*" Nancy turned back to him, sparks still leaping from her fingers.

"It's a last resort! I can't- I don't like to use them!"

"Why?"

"That's not important!"

"*Everything* is important!" Nancy screamed. "Everything's important when my baby brother's in trouble and we have to trust you! How can we trust you when you hide this?"

"Well, how can we trust *you*? You only told people you had powers because *you got Mike captured!*"

Everyone froze, as Nancy stepped back, shock and anger still rippling through her.

"Okay," Jonathan said, stepping forwards slightly, "Okay, I think we

need to-“

“You little *shit!*” Nancy yelled, instead moving closer to Richie, who stared her down. “This isn’t about *me!* Why do you have two powers?”

“It’s not *important!*”

“What are you keeping from us?”

“*It’s not important!*”

“Why won’t you tell us this?” Nancy asked, as Richie finally stepped back, shaking his head and moving his hands to his ears, in a fruitless attempt to block out her shouts.

“Shut up!”

“What are you hiding? Why can’t you go into town? Why don’t you have a missing poster?”

“*Shut up! Shut up!*”

“Why won’t you talk to us?”

“*SHUT UP!*”

“*Why do you look like my brother?*”

And then Richie snapped, shooting up to look Nancy dead in the eye, dropping his hands, cold anger in his glare, as he screeched,

“*Because I AM!*”

And then he realized what he’d said, and his face fell into a shocked panic.

Everyone was silent, staring at Richie, who stared at Nancy, who just looked... confused? Hurt? Angry?

And then Richie turned and bolted out the door, becoming a complete blur.

He was gone before they could even blink.

22. Some Things should not be Broken

Notes for the Chapter:

Okay so I am LIVING for your responses to last chapter! Seriously that made my day lol.

Unfortunately, we're taking a little detour to see what Mike's up to before we find out more about Richie's situation. But don't worry; we'll spend about 3-4 chapters just on THAT.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Some Things should not be Broken

Mike didn't even bother to ask where they were going this time.

He just stood up when the Guards entered, keeping his head down, and followed them as they dragged him down the hall, trying his best not to scream as they gripped his arms so much that he *hurt*, his arms *hurt* and his legs *hurt* and his chest *hurt* and nothing was okay. Nothing about this was *okay*.

But he couldn't do anything. He couldn't do anything, not after what had happened yesterday, not after he knew what they would do to him. He'd been having a panic attack, and they'd made it worse, they'd *kept attacking*, just because he'd tried to defend himself.

He hadn't calmed down for hours after that, a long time after they'd gotten tired of taking out their anger on him and thrown him back into Solitary, still screaming and sobbing. He'd been there for God only knew how long, still breaking down and trapped in his own mind, until he'd been in Solitary for long enough to figure out he wasn't been attacked any more, which was probably after several hours. He hadn't even been able to sleep; he'd just kept shivering and occasionally crying and trying to piece himself back together. He wasn't sure he'd even succeeded by the time they came to pick him

up.

He just needed to hold on. Hold on until his friends got there. Just hold on. Just a little bit longer.

He was moved into a room, and he felt a spark of confusion as he looked around. He was in a testing room, but on the other side of the glass- fuck the glass, seriously- and standing behind several scientists. Mike briefly glanced towards the Guards, trying to see if they'd taken a wrong turn, but they simply pushed him forwards, against the table right in front of the window, as the Doctors turned towards him, looking blank. Brenner was up there, too, and Mike moved his glare to the top of the table, not wanting to look at him.

The Guards moved to close the door, as Brenner said, “Your allies were spotted in the area. Did you know that?” Mike didn’t answer, and Brenner didn’t wait long for a response. “I suppose you expect that they’re going to break you out.”

Mike kept his eyes on the table, wondering he could possibly burn a hole through it with the intensity of his look.

Brenner nodded to another scientist, who gave him a labelled container. Mike finally glanced up, scanning the label, as Brenner said, “Do you know what this is?”

Mike stayed silent for a second, and then Brenner said, “Well, you said that you were- what was it? ‘Into Science’?” As Mike continued scanning the label, Brenner said sharply, “Well? What is it?”

Jumping a little, Mike answered, in a quiet and flat voice, “It’s Methoxyflurane. A volatile inhalational anesthetic. Sleeping Gas used in Hospitals.”

“Good.” Brenner’s compliment stung Mike, and he glanced away again. “And do you know what sleeping gas does?”

God, it wasn’t as if Mike was two years old. “It knocks you out.”

“That it does.” Brenner said, before handing the doctor back the container.

"It's not strong." Mike said, still quiet. "Only lasts about a half hour."

"Oh, yes." Brenner said. "That's why we have a much stronger sleeping gas in storage."

Something gripped at Mike's chest, some kind of panic that he couldn't place.

"And if you mix it with the right chemicals, it can render anyone who ingests it completely immobile. I'm sure you remember it- you were under its effects for a while before we allowed you to wake up." Mike flinched. "It could knock out anybody who, say, *breaths it in* for a long enough time for them to be... contained."

Mike suddenly felt like everything was crashing in on him. He had a feeling that this wasn't a threat towards him, specifically.

"And we could set them off in every room we like; should the doors be shut, it would only affect anyone inside."

Finally, Mike said, "They won't... they won't fall for it." They'd split up, have people wait outside, not all stick together, not all get captured, all help each other, all work to take care of each other...

"They will." Brenner said. "Because we know how to draw them into a room; we've been watching you and your friends for years." *Years?* "And you just gave us everything we needed last night."

Brenner nodded at a doctor, who moved towards the edge of the table and typed something into the computer.

And then Mike heard himself screaming.

He thought, for a split second, that he might have dissociated, that he might be screaming and not able to tell. But, no, his mouth was still shut. And that was when he realized that he was listening to a recording of himself, a recording of himself screaming and sobbing and *panicking*.

Slowly, very slowly, Mike turned to Brenner, feeling his horror leak into his expression. Brenner, as always, showed no emotion.

In a second, the screaming was shut off, and Mike could only stare and shake.

“I think that any of your allies will go into any room with those sounds. And our doors can be closed remotely.”

Mike didn’t ask why he was telling him this; he knew. He knew that Brenner wanted to rub it into his face that his friends were all going to get trapped and knocked out and sent of too experiments and torture and whatever *else* they wanted to do to them. And he could do nothing. *Nothing*.

“You’ll remain here, so that Eleven doesn’t try to track you and find out that you’re in a different place.” Brenner said. “After that, some of you will go to our other branches. Can’t have you all in one place.”

His stomach was doing flips, and his head was spinning.

Brenner looked down at Mike, and Mike stared at him in terror for what might have been seconds or might have been minutes.

Finally, he said, his voice breaking even more than he thought it could, “ *Why ? Why are you doing this to us?*”

The look that Brenner and the other scientists gave Mike was his answer. There were looks of apathy, and looks of disgust. None of sympathy.

He wasn’t a person to them. Because of what he could do, they could see him as another being. They could justify to themselves everything they were putting him through, because they didn’t see him as a *person*.

He wasn’t a *person*.

His friends weren’t *people*.

They were freaks. Mutants. *Monsters*.

That’s all the Lab would ever see them as.

How many people saw them as that, and nothing more?

Monsters.

And that's all they'd ever be. Because the Lab was going to capture them and they couldn't get out. And it was his *fault*.

His fault.

And at that moment, Mike Wheeler broke.

The light slowly faded out of his eyes, and he felt his face fall blank. He didn't even react as Brenner smiled that unnerving smile, didn't bother to glare at him. Brenner turned to the Soldiers at the door, and said, "Alright. Take him to testing." Mike didn't even react as the guards dragged him away.

And then he went to Testing, thrown into another room to hold up his field. Mike stood there, let them throw things into it, onto it, even let them shock the field. He screamed in pain on occasion, but his face still laid blank, his heart sinking slowly into his chest.

And after training was done, Mike was taken somewhere else- he didn't care where, he didn't *care* about anything.

As they walked through the hall, they passed by guards carrying Ben. Ben turned, looking at Mike, a quick glance that said, *Are you okay?*

Mike simply stared back, barely registering the panic in Ben's eyes. And after they passed, Mike had a slow realization.

He realized that he was crying.

He'd never cried silently before, never let tears spill from his eyes in silence while he wasn't looking. It wasn't a nice feeling.

He kept walking.

23. Richie refuses to tell people Necessary Information

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Richie refuses to tell people Necessary Information

As soon as Richie was out the door, Max rushed after him, entering into speedmode herself and racing out.

Nancy took a step forwards, moving to follow her, and she moved her hands out, sparks coming instantly out of her fingertips. In a flash, Bev had thrown out her hand, and Nancy froze, the sparks slowly disappearing.

“Holy shit!” Jonathan screamed, looking ahead at her.

“Let go of her!” Kali yelled, eyes wide, moving towards Bev.

Bev, meanwhile, simply threw out another hand, and Kali was thrown back by a black cloud.

“What are you *doing*?” Steve asked.

Bev lowered her hand, and Nancy gasped, doubling over, before whipping around. “What the *fuck*?”

“What are you going to do to Richie?” Bev asked, a dark tone in her voice.

Nancy glanced to the others, confused. “Why the *fuck* did you hold me back by my *blood*?”

“What are you *going to do to Richie*?” Bev looked *furious*.

“I just want to find out *what he just said!*”

“Are you going to hurt him?”

“No, no-”

“Let Max bring him back.” Hanlon said after a second. “We can talk to-”

“What else is he hiding from us?” Nancy asked, whipping towards Bill. “Why didn’t he tell us he could *wipe memories*? What did he mean-”

Bill paused, glancing between everyone, and he said, “That’s... that’s for Richie to say, I sh-sh-shouldn’t have....”

“What are you *all* hiding from us?” Nancy asked.

The Losers all jumped, glancing to each other.

At that moment, Nancy turned to go again, and Hanlon suddenly threw out his hands, and Nancy found her feet iced to the floor. She whipped her head around, glaring at him, before glaring down at her feet. Smoke suddenly burst from her feet, and then the ice exploded in a burst of flame. Nancy whipped around, summoning the fire back to her hands, and then thrust them towards the Losers. Everyone screamed as Hanlon threw up an ice wall, blocking the flames.

“Nancy!” El yelled, but all the sudden, Kali turned towards the Losers, waving her palm. Bev and Hanlon leapt back, shutting their eyes and screaming. “*Kali!*”

“Leave them alone!” Will yelled suddenly, grabbing the faded wallpaper and letting his skin turn green, before throwing out an arm and watching as plants burst from the ground, knocking Nancy off of her feet, before turning to Kali. He froze for a second, hesitation flickering in his eyes, and then El screeched, “Stop it! Stop it!”

As everyone jumped up, preparing to either fight or try to *stop* everyone from fighting, Steve let out an, “*Enough!*”

Suddenly, everyone screamed as they floated, weightless, to the ceiling, slamming against it. The only one left on the ground was Steve, who was had his eyes shut and his hands extended upwards.

“Steve!” Nancy yelled, as soon as she regained her breath, “What the *fuck*?”

“We’re not fighting each other! We’re not fucking animals!” Steve said. “Now, you all are going to stay up there and wait for Max and Richie!”

“Are you seriously putting us in time out?” Kali asked, raising an eyebrow. “Like we’re children?”

“Lucas, Jonathan and I didn’t even *do* anything!” Dustin yelled.

“Everyone *stays!*” Steve yelled. “Until Max and Richie are back!”

Max caught up to Richie several feet into the woods.

The kid could run fast, sure, but he hadn’t been running in speedmode off-and-on for about five years. Max could easily leap over roots, duck under branches, and turn bends without having to stop her feet and exit her speedmode, which Richie was still getting the hang of.

“Richie!” Max yelled as she rushed forwards, her hair flying behind her. Richie didn’t stop, so Max waited until she was close enough to him, and then she jumped, tackling him to the ground.

Normal Speed caught up to them the second their feet stopped moving, and then Richie was screaming, trying to push her off. She held him down, before managing to move him enough to pin him against a tree. He was kicking, trying to throw her off, screaming, “Let me go! Let me go !”

“Shut up, do you want people to hear us?” Max yelled over him, doing as best she could to hold him still.

“Let me go!” Max suddenly realized that he was crying, sobbing as he tried to get away from her. “Let me go, *please!*”

“What is *wrong?*” Max asked, her stomach sinking as she tried to figure out how best to keep him calm, cheer him up, stop him from crying. “Richie, what *happened?*”

“I can’t- I *can’t-*”

“Richie, please-”

“I *can’t*-”

Max paused, looking at her friend, slacking a little as Richie stopped fighting, just continuing to cry. “Can’t... what?”

Richie looked up at her, his eyes desperate and pleading, and he said, “I can’t face her.”

Max stared at him, as he continued to cry, and finally, something clicked in her mind.

And she understood everything.

“Oh, Richie...”

Richie glanced at the ground, tears still streaming from his face.

“How long?”

“What?”

“How long have you been gone?”

He didn’t look her in the eye. “It’ll be seven years in eight weeks.”

Seven years.

“And the Lab?”

He nodded.

She leaned over and hugged him, letting him cry into her shoulder. And then she said, “Richie... you have to tell them. They have to know.”

“I *can’t*...”

“Who knows already?”

Richie paused. “B-Bill. He broke into my house when I was sick and home alone. And I told Eddie some of it.”

“And?”

“That’s it.”

“Come on, let’s get you back.”

“I can’t-“

“I’ll be right there.” she promised. “And so will Bill, and Bev and Mike-“

“They’ll hate me.” Richie said softly. “Bev and Mike. Because I didn’t...”

“They’re your friends. They’ll get over it. And if they don’t, I’ll beat some manners into them.”

Richie laughed. “You’d never take them.”

“We’ll see.”

And so Max grabbed Richie’s arm, shut her eyes, and sped them back to the hideout.

Upon Max and Richie’s entrance, everyone dropped from the ceiling to the floor. The two teens blinked, turning to Steve.

“They were in time-out.” he said simply.

Slowly, Richie turned back to the group. They stared, and the first one to move was El, who walked right in front of him.

“Are you okay?” she asked. Richie shook his head. “What happened?”

Richie glanced to Nancy, and then moved, sitting on one of the chairs, staring into nothing. El moved after him, sitting on the floor next to him, as Max moved to take the other side of the chair. Slowly, everyone moved to sit, too. Bill and Richie stared at each other for a long time, with Richie looking very guilty.

Finally, Nancy moved, standing right in front of Richie.

“What... what did you mean?” Nancy asked. “That you’re...”

“Your brother?” Richie said, before glancing to the ground. “Just that.” He took a deep breath, and then asked, “How is Baby Holly? She’s gotta be seven now.”

Nancy stared at him. “What... what?”

Richie sighed. “It’s a long story.”

“We’ve got a day,” El said, “Until Joyce and Hop. We can hear it.”

Richie bit his lip, and then he glanced to the Losers, who just stared. And then he said, “It started with the Accident.”

As Nancy jumped, he turned back to her. “There’s... there’s a reason that you and Mikey remember it differently. It’s because I wiped myself from the memory and gave you both different replacements by accident. Because I was a fuckup back then.”

“Wh... why would you do that?”

Richie shut his eyes. “Because they told me to.”

There was a dead silence, before he said, “That file you found? Of Mike at the Lab? That wasn’t him. He wasn’t the Wheeler who got experimented on. I was.”

And then he looked down at his right arm, laughing a little. “God, I covered this in so much makeup...”

He rushed off, becoming a blur, and then they could all hear water running in the bathroom. He came out in a few moments, still scrubbing his arm with a towel.

Finally, he dropped the towel, and showed them all a simple tattoo.

012.

“I was nine.” he said quietly, as everyone gasped, and Dustin muttered a curse word. “I was nine,” he turned to a shocked Nancy, “And you were thirteen, and we were *stupid*.”

24. Accidents Happen [Flashback, Part One]

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Accidents Happen [Flashback, Part One]

Seven Years Before

He hadn't been Richie back then.

He'd had a different name, but he'd never liked it. His Mom had thought it'd be cute to give her twins matching names, but he didn't like that. It made him feel like part of a set, like he didn't exist on his own. Sure, his name was decent enough, and occasionally he liked hearing it, but... well, changing his name a lot got him some things he liked. Like attention. With a Dad who never cared much for him and a Mom who tapped out anytime she could, attention was a rare and wonderful thing to have.

He'd flipped through nicknames like his brother flicked through comic book pages, sometimes picking them up from parts of his name, sometimes from favorite characters or new celebrities. His parents never used the nicknames, always referring to him as the name they'd given him, whether out of forgetfulness or stubbornness. Nancy tried, she really did, but sometimes she'd just slip into the name she was used to. And his friends never remembered, either, though they tried a bit harder than his teachers. The only one who remembered was Mike, and he used to joke that it was special twin powers.

But of all the names he'd ever had, he liked Richie the best. Granted, it was a name he'd picked up because he was on the run, a name he used only because he *couldn't* use his "twin name", but... well, he still liked it. He liked it a lot.

Not that he didn't miss hearing his twin name every now and again.

Not that he didn't do a double-take anytime he heard it on TV or while Ben was ranting about a kid in his science class. Not that, whenever he woke up suddenly from a nightmare or calmed down a panic attack, he didn't feel very confused when he was referred to by a name he'd picked in order to hide. Sometimes he missed it, missed hearing his sister yell his full name because he shoved cookies in the disc player, missed hearing his Mom call for him, missed the luxury of rolling his eyes at her for forgetting his most recent nickname.

But he'd left that name behind, left the whole "Wheeler" name behind; he'd taken the name *Tozier* after a historical figure he'd had to research in his last school assignment and *Richie* off of a character from his brother's favorite book. So he just called himself "Richie" now, and he liked that. His friends called him "Richie." They called him that when they were telling him to Beep Beep, when they called him to ask if he wanted to go to the Quarry, when they calmed him down from a sobbing fit he'd had when he saw an unexplained red balloon.

So he'd use "Richie." He'd call himself that, no matter what he was remembering. It was his name now, and he wasn't going to lose this one.

He'd discovered his power when he was eight.

He'd heard about powered kids on the news, sure, but he hadn't ever thought he could *be* one. Until one day in class, his teacher pulled him aside and showed him a doodle he'd done on the back of his homework sheet.

"This is the third time this week, Mr. Wheeler." she'd said. "I told you not to draw on your papers."

"It's not blocking the text." Richie said softly. "It's fine."

"I'm going to have to call your parents."

"No, don't!" Richie pleaded, grabbing her sleeve. His Mom had yelled at him for the last time, when he'd drawn himself slaying the

Principal-Dragon, and she said he'd get grounded if he did it again.
"Please, leave it alone!"

"You can't keep drawing on your homework, it's unprofessional."

"I'm not a *professional*, not yet!" Richie said.

And then he'd made eye-contact with her, and something inside of him *awakened*. He felt a pull in his chest, and a light feeling in his eyes, and he'd said, almost instinctively, "*There's nothing wrong with my paper.*"

And then he felt himself slipping away, slipping into a... a *void*. And he saw from *her* eyes, saw her looking at the paper, and groaning, and calling him in, and arguing. And then it all vanished in front of him, replaced with what he'd wanted- her looking at his paper, and seeing nothing out of the ordinary.

And then he was back, and he stumbled backwards, shocked. He looked up, and screamed as he saw the teacher's eyes were blank and clouded. He stood there for a few minutes, panicking and trying to figure out what to do, until the clouds in her eyes dissipated, and she simply put his homework sheet back on the pile.

"Well, Mr. Wheeler," the teacher said, after a second, "It's Recess. You should go outside."

Richie slowly nodded, and then ran.

He hadn't told anyone what had happened, but he'd figured it out for himself. He had superpowers, he could change memories. He used it once or twice, to get a bully out of his way or get himself out of trouble. But only rarely, when nobody else was around. He'd seen the way people reacted to powered kids on the news, and he didn't want that.

He wondered if he should tell Mike, but he decided against it. Mike was terrible at keeping secrets. Besides, if Mike had powers, he'd know, and if he didn't have powers, well, Richie wouldn't bother him with this.

Richie had been nine years old when the accident had happened.

“We’re going to be okay!” Nancy said, though she looked very, very lost. “It’s okay, we’ll find our way home, I think I know...”

“We’re gonna *die!*” Mike wailed, his knuckles turning white as he gripped onto his sister’s hand.

“We’re going to be *okay!*” Nancy said, a bit more forcefully.

“Yeah, chill out, Mikey!” Richie said, forcing a smile onto his face. “We’ll be okay!”

They were wandering down a street they hadn’t seen before, struggling to find their apartment. They’d been shopping with Mom and Dad, shopping for new toys for the new baby, when they were forced to evacuate due to a fire in the basement, and the children had followed the wrong person down several streets. And now here they were, trying as hard as they could to find home, or find a person who could direct them towards their street.

And it was also raining. It was starting to rain *hard*, and Richie finally said, “Nancy, I’m *cold.*”

“I know, I know, we’ll be okay...” Nancy said.

“I want to go *home.*” Mike wailed.

“We’ll just... we’ll get out of the rain, and I’ll try to call Mom.” Nancy said.

“Do you have your phone?” Richie asked.

“You can’t call people from your phone.” Mike added. “Mom said-“

“Well, it’s an emergency.” Nancy said. “If I have my phone, I can try to...”

“Look!” Richie pointed ahead, and they looked ahead to see a shed in someone’s backyard, the door slightly ajar. “We can hide in there!”

“That’s n-not ours.” Mike said quietly. “The owners’ll be mad.”

“We’ll just explain that we’re lost.” Nancy said, dragging her brothers closer to the door. “They’ll understand, and they can help us call Mom and Dad if my phone doesn’t work...”

They ducked inside, with Nancy shutting the door behind them to keep them from getting even more wet. Richie glanced around briefly, seeing only gardening supplies and a mounted coat rack on the door.

“Aw, crap.” Nancy said, as she reached into her empty pocket, to find only damp fabric, and no phone.

“Nancy!” Mike said, through his crying, “That’s a bad word!”

“I know a worse word!” Richie volunteered, smiling and grabbing his brother’s arm. “I heard Dad say it during football. It’s fu-”

“That’s enough outta you.” Nancy said, gesturing to him. “Look, we just need to stay here until the rain stops. We’ll find an adult, and someone will get us home.”

“I don’t wanna be lost!” Mike said, still crying. “I want to be home!”

“Mikey, let’s calm down.” Richie said, smiling up at him. “Come on, let’s play ‘I Spy’. Will that be okay?”

Mike nodded, and Richie jumped around the Shed, glancing back and forth. “Okay, uh, I Spy something green.”

“The shovel?” Mike asked, reaching to poke the shovel next to them, as Nancy moved to sit down, still scouring her pockets.

“Yeah!” Richie said. “Your turn!”

“I Spy... a- a thing that starts with R?”

“Uh...” ‘Rake’ was obviously the answer. “The paint buckets?”

“That doesn’t start with R!”

“Well, they’re... Red!”

“Come on!”

“Fine.” Richie moved towards the rake, picking it up and waving it like a wand. “The Rake?”

Mike nodded, now smiling a little. Good, that was progress. “Okay,” Richie beamed, “I Spy... a thing you put coats on.”

Mike grinned, jumping onto his feet and running to the mounted coatrack. “The coatrack!”

But as he touched it, something happened.

He grabbed onto the third notch, and then accidentally pulled it down, like a lever. And then, as they watched, part of the floor flipped, revealing a descending staircase.

The Wheeler children all stared, looking into the blackness. Nancy and Mike both turned white, while Richie jumped to his feet. “Awesome!”

After a second, Mike grinned, too. “It’s a Secret Entrance!”

“It’s like a Spy Movie!” Richie added.

“Let’s go!”

“Boys, boys!” Nancy said, as Mike and Richie rushed forwards. “Boys, wait, it could be dangerous!”

“It’s more interesting than staying in the shed!” Mike yelled back, before the twins rushed down, giggling to themselves.

The stairway down was dark; Richie could barely see in front of him. After a while, the boys stopped laughing, instead glancing at each other to make sure they were still there. Nancy was pretty far behind them, and she started calling, “Boys! Come back! Come on, let’s go back up! This isn’t our shed! Come on!”

They finally started to see light flicker on the bottom stairs, and they raced forwards, moving towards the room, hoping to see some secret spy equipment or something.

Once they reached the bottom, though, they simply stared in shock and bewilderment.

Up ahead was a pure white room, and then there was a large, glass wall. Behind the wall was... *something*. Something was glowing, changing colors, pushing against the glass, shaking the room ever-so-slightly.

“What is it?” Mike asked quietly.

“I... I wanna go.” Richie said, but he didn’t move.

“Boys!” Nancy called, still running down.

After a second, Mike took a step forwards, and Richie with him. They walked a little closer, but stopped about halfway across the room, when the light hit the glass again, and the room shook *harder*. Richie immediately buried his head in his brother’s shoulder, whimpering slightly. “Nancy’s right.” he whispered, fear suddenly overtaking him. “Nancy’s right, let’s go.”

“But... but look at it.” Mike said, wonder in his voice. “It looks... pretty.”

“Mikey, let’s go.”

Mike shook his head, slowly releasing Richie’s grip, and he walked towards the glass, curiosity overcoming his fear.

“Mike!” Richie called.

Nancy suddenly reached the stairs, seeing up ahead. “What the hell? Mike, get back!”

Mike paused, having reached the glass, as the room shook again.

Nancy rushed forwards, managing to reach Richie, grabbing his shoulders, trying to drag him back. “Mike, come on, let’s go-”

Slowly, Mike reached forwards and touched the glass wall.

There was a heartbeat, a pause, as the ground rumbled.

And then the glass exploded, shards flying everywhere, *heat* going everywhere, and Nancy whipped around as fast as she could, shielding Richie from the blast, screaming.

Suddenly, Richie was hot. He was *too hot*, he felt the heat of the blast, and he could hear Mike and Nancy screaming behind him, and he might be screaming, too, but all he could think of was how close his brother was to the wall, how he must have gotten hit with the shards, how *loud* he was screaming...

And then he felt burns in his shoulders, burns where Nancy had gripped him. He felt like he was on fire- he *was!* He was on fire!

He dropped to the ground, finally managing to break Nancy's grip, still screaming in pain as he felt his arms burn. He tried rolling on the ground, like they'd told him to do so many times at school, but he only managed to land his leg on a glass shard, and that *didn't* help.

"*Mike! Mike!*" Nancy screamed, before turning to her other brother, eyes wide and terrified; somehow, her burns were minimal, somehow she was less harmed than her brothers. "*Are you okay? Are you okay?*"

Richie kept screaming, and he heard Nancy say, "*I'm getting help! I'm getting help!*" She ran past him, but he barely noticed, he just felt the fire and heat...

And then he realized Mike wasn't screaming at all.

No... no, he can't be...

He blacked out before Nancy came back, two policemen who'd been patrolling the area following her, before they carried him and Mike to the hospital, to be treated for the burns, and for Mike to be treated for all the injuries he got from the glass shards, the shards that had missed Richie by mere inches.

When he woke up, Mike was still asleep, in the hospital bed next to him. Mike stayed asleep for another day, while Richie cried and hugged Nancy when she came to visit, and tried his best to tell the nurses and doctors and policemen what had happened. But even he

didn't really know, and he wished to God he could just change his own memories, get rid of the terror he'd felt when he'd been hit with that blast of energy.

And he wished he could help Mike.

Because after Mike woke up, he was... different. He was quieter, he cried a lot more, and... well, a few days after they got back from the Hospital, Richie had dropped a glass cup while he was getting it out of the pantry, and it had broken on the floor, and Mike...

Mike hadn't taken it well.

And when he'd calmed down enough to realize Richie was in front of him, he just hugged him and sobbed.

When their Mom came home, Richie considered telling her, but instead, Karen had pulled the boys aside. "I got something for you while I was out." she said carefully, a smile growing.

She then pulled out a stuffed animal- a wolf.

"I know you liked that book series about wolves." she said. "And I figured, you guys used to share toys all the time. Would you... would you like this one?"

The boys had nodded, but Mike smiled more than his brother, grabbing onto the animal. "It's cute!" he said.

Richie paused, glancing towards their Mom. Should they... should they tell her about Mike's panic attack?

No. This wasn't the time.

Maybe they could tell her later.

Richie realized, only a few weeks after the incident, that he had new powers.

He'd been playing with Mike, and then after they'd finished playing

tag inside because his Mom yelled at them not to hit anything, he'd gone into his room and slammed the door too hard. Something fell off his shelf, moving straight for his head, and Richie threw his hands up.

And a forcefield sprang from his hands, sending the book that had fallen away from him.

He'd frozen, confused, before standing in the middle of his room and teaching himself how to make forcefields. Once he was sure that yes, he *could* do it, he wondered if this was connected to his memory erasure.

And then an hour passed since he'd tagged Mike last, and he felt *exhausted*.

He collapsed on the bed, shutting his eyes and trying to figure out why he was suddenly so *tired*. He tried to summon another forcefield, to see if maybe that would do something for it, but no matter how hard he tried, no forcefields came.

Then, the next day, he'd woken up, jumping off of the top of the bunk bed, and run over to Mike, grinning and giving him a side-hug as his brother looked at himself in the mirror, looking a little sad.
“Hey, Mikey! What’s up?”

Mike jumped, turning towards Richie. “What’s wrong with your eyes?”

“What?”

“They... they flashed. When you touched me.” Mike said, waving.
“When you touched me, your eyes were gold.”

Richie paused. Maybe this was a... a hallucination? Maybe it was part of the flashbacks he had sometimes. “No, no, they’re fine, Mikey. Are you okay?”

Mike paused, before shaking his head a little and leaving.

And then Richie did realize he felt something different- he felt some kind of energy moving around inside. He held out his hands, and a

forcefield appeared.

And in an hour, he was exhausted again.

He figured out exactly what his new power was a few months later, when Mike had another panic attack.

They'd been walking down the street, finally allowed to go out by themselves, to go ask their Mom's friend in the next apartment building if she still had Nancy's old baby crib. Mom had made Richie wear contacts that day- she wanted to see if they'd work better than his clunky old glasses, but he didn't like putting the things in his eyes. They were on their way back, giggling about something they'd seen on TV, when they'd heard yelling behind them.

Richie turned, glaring, to see one of the bully kids from school- he couldn't remember his name, maybe Troy? But he started yelling at Mike, and Richie figured out quite quickly that Mike had gotten him in trouble at school.

"What did you do?" Richie asked Mike.

Mike glanced down. "Nothing. I... I freaked out when he almost dropped a glass, and he was gonna do it again, so I... I screamed until the teacher came over. It's not a big deal."

Troy kept yelling, saying something about how much of a weakling Mike was, when he moved to push him. Mike instantly stepped back, yelling, and he threw up his hands.

And a forcefield surrounded them.

Troy was pushed back, falling to the ground, and Richie whipped around, staring at Mike in terror. For a fraction of a second, Mike looked... fascinated. A small smile flickered with the light, and Mike looked... happy.

And then Mike's eyes widened in terror, and the forcefield dropped, and Mike started screaming and crying, throwing up his hands to cover his ears, clearly in the middle of a panic attack.

Troy had leapt up, about to scream, starting to yell that he was some kind of *freak*. Richie moved fast, leaping forwards and grabbing Troy's arm, dragging him back around and making eye contact with him. Within a few seconds, any memory of the encounter was gone, and Richie simply turned Troy around, pushing him out of the street before he could come to.

And then Richie ran back, still hearing Mike's panic, before sliding to a stop; Nancy was standing over him, muttering, trying her best to calm him down. Richie slowly approached, trying to explain things to Nancy, but she simply kept her focus on Mike, kept her focus on calming him down.

Richie, meanwhile, turned to stare at his reflection in the windows.

Mike could do forcefields, too.

Or... maybe Richie couldn't.

He'd only summoned forcefields after touching Mike. After... after *stealing* his powers.

Richie could steal powers.

And, briefly, Richie saw a man watching them in the window's reflection, from across the street. But as he turned to look, the man simply turned and left, leaving the children alone.

About a week later, Richie saw two men in a van.

He and Mike were having a picnic in the park, with Nancy sitting with her friends a few feet away. Mike had brought the stuffed wolf, the one they owned together. They owned it together but Mike liked it more; Richie didn't quite like playing with stuffed animals as much as his siblings.

They were outside because their parents were packing up the house; they were going to move, and Richie wasn't sure why. He thought it might be to get them away from the street that the accident had happened on, but he didn't think to ask. And he really didn't want to

go; he didn't want to move, he *hated* change. But, well, he did enjoy being outside with Mike, just watching the sun and not thinking about anything.

"You're so weird." Richie said, glancing towards his brother, who had snuck a bottle of Maple Syrup out with them to pour over the eggs his Mom had prepared for them.

"No, I'm not!" Mike argued.

Richie grabbed the maple syrup bottle, earning a shout from his twin. "Maple Syrup on Eggs is *disgusting*. You're such a nerd!"

And then, without breaking eye contact, he poured the maple syrup directly into his milk.

"You're such an ass!" Mike giggled.

"Oh, don't let Nancy hear you swear! She'll tell Mom!"

"Shit!" Mike shouted, earning a giggle from his brother. "Shit! Damn! Guts!"

The boys both burst into giggles, almost falling over as they laughed and Nancy shot them a glare before turning back to Barb, telling her about the book she'd just finished.

And then Richie looked over towards the street, and saw the men through van windows. They looked oddly familiar, and it took a minute for Richie to figure out why. Then something clicked in his head, and he realized that he'd seen the driver across the street from them, right after Mike's panic attack.

Slowly, he glanced towards Mike. Their parents always told them not to talk to strangers, but, well, he was pretty sure those guys were watching them.

And he remembered... he remembered hearing on the news that powered kids were to be reported to the police. Powered kids were to be locked up and hidden.

And if that man saw Mike...

“Hey, Mikey, I’ll be right back. Gonna go pee in the woods.”

“Ew, gross!” Mike laughed, hugging the wolf a little.

“Why don’t you go see what Nancy’s doing?”

“Don’t go too far, Mom’ll kill you.”

Richie laughed, and then Mike ran off.

Slowly, very slowly, Richie turned towards the van, and he stood up and walked over. The men saw him coming, slowly rolled down the window to look at him.

“Why are you watching us?” Richie asked.

The men glanced towards each other, and than the one closest to him leaned over, looking closely at his face. “Did you summon a forcefield a week ago?”

Richie froze. They didn’t know the difference between him and Mike, they didn’t know who had the forcefields, they didn’t know...

They didn’t know *which* twin had powers.

Meaning that if they thought only *one* of them could do magic, they’d only be mad at that one.

Richie slowly looked up, and said, “I can wipe memories. The fields... the fields are harder.”

The men stared at him, and then the driver said, “Okay, kid, you’re going to have to come with us.”

“What?” Richie said, fear suddenly gripping him. “What, no, I can’t... listen, I’m gonna have to ask my sister...”

He backed up a little, before turning, intending to run. He heard a car door slam behind him, and just as he picked up speed, some kind of cloth was shoved over his mouth and nose, muffling his screams. He breathed in *something*, and as he was thrown into the back of the van, still unable to scream, he passed out cold.

25. Richie on the Run [Flashback, Part Two]

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Richie on the Run [Flashback, Part Two]

Seven Years Before

When Richie woke up, he was in a cold, white room. The bed he was on was hard and small, his glasses were on a table next to him, and as he sat up, rubbing his eyes and trying to remember how he'd gotten there, he realized that his clothes were gone. He'd been changed into a simple white hospital gown, which reached only just past his knees.

Once he remembered where he was, Richie curled up, starting to cry. He'd only been there a few minutes when the door opened, and a tall man came in, a man who seemed very scary, but Richie wasn't sure why.

"Where am I?" Richie managed to ask, shoving his glasses on as fast as he could. The man didn't answer, so he asked, "Why am I here?"

The man finally said, "You're here because you can do special things. We're trying to find out what you can do."

"I don't want to." Richie said. "I wanna go home."

"I'm afraid you'll be here for a while." The man said. "You'll be able to—"

"No!" Richie said, his voice raising. "I wanna go home! I wanna go home!"

He kept screaming and sobbing, and when the man did nothing, just staring at him, Richie thought, *What would Mike and Nancy do?*

They'd fight.

He jumped forwards, moving to run out of the room, only to find his arm grabbed by the man behind him. Richie screamed and kicked, trying to fight him, and before he knew it, more arms were around him, more men were there, dragging him off as he screamed and fought.

And then he was thrown into a smaller room, a darker room, and the door was shut, and Richie was alone, still sobbing and screaming.

Richie was in Solitary for a very long time, and by the time the guards let him out, Richie was so terrified of the darkness and the lack of space and the isolation that he'd do whatever they wanted, at least for a while.

So the experiments began, so the Scientists could learn about his powers. And while they learned what he could do, Richie learned a lot, too.

He learned that the Scary Man was named Brenner, by listening to the doctors as they talked to him. He learned that they still thought he could do forcefields, but just that it was very hard for him to do so, so they just focused on what he told them he *could* do- memory altering. He learned that while there were other “experiments”, none of them were in the Lab at the moment, but some would be transferred in a few months.

And he learned to shut up. Because if he was too loud, too cheeky, too stubborn, he got punished. And Solitary wasn't the only thing they could do to him; if he kept being a smartass, he got hit more, and once he was kicked. And one time, he'd said he was *tired*, he wanted to *stop*, and he got a cattle prod shoved in his side.

That had not been fun.

He'd cried on the first night, wondering if maybe he could find a way to escape and go home. But the Lab People could probably find out where he lived, they'd follow him, and he didn't think his parents

would move the family away if they found out Richie had powers; they might just bring him back, or bring Mike, too. They'd bring him right back to the Lab and he'd get punished worse.

Maybe he could run into the woods. But he wouldn't be able to live on his own; he wasn't even ten years old yet, he'd probably survive about a week if he was lucky.

So he stayed, and he followed the Doctors, and he did what he was told.

And sometime after the first week, while Richie was sitting in a room, trying to keep his mouth shut until the men stopped asking him questions, he heard the scientists talking outside, talking with Brenner.

“The siblings are rioting. They’re trying to find him, they’re making a fuss.”

“We’ll take care of it.”

“I don’t know if a fake body’ll work. You know they were in that accident, too, it’s possible that they have abilities as well, they just haven’t shown any...”

“If they do, they’ll come with us. If they don’t, we’ll... *take care* of them. Make *certain* they don’t make trouble.”

Richie felt himself pale. *Nancy and Mike. They’re looking for me. Nancy and Mike. They’re in trouble.*

“Kid, pay attention!” said the Doctor in the room with him.

Richie slowly turned to him, and then he said, “I want to speak to Brenner.”

The Doctors glanced towards each other, and then he said, “We’re not done.”

“Please,” Richie said, trying his best to remain calm, “I won’t ask anything ever again, just let me talk to him alone.”

The Doctors paused, and then one moved out of the room, saying something to Brenner. Richie shut his eyes, waiting, until he heard a, "Okay. He's coming in. If you try anything-"

"You'll hurt me, I know." Richie said, finally opening his eyes and looking up at the Doctor. "I just want to talk."

The Doctors left, and Brenner entered.

"I heard you talking." Richie said, staring up at him, before slowly standing up. "I wanna make a deal."

Brenner raised an eyebrow. "A deal?"

"You leave my siblings alone." Richie said quietly. "They're not powered, and I don't want them to find me."

"Why not?"

Richie wanted to say, *Because I don't want them to get hurt*, but he knew that would be giving them a weakness. He knew they wouldn't hesitate to hurt him, so they wouldn't hesitate to hurt something he cared about. So he had to lie, even if it hurt him inside to do so.

"They're not special." Richie said. "They don't care about me. If they find me they'll make me go back home. And I don't want them *here*, because they'll get all the attention."

Just make him think you're a bratty kid. Just make him think you're an asshole so he won't hurt Nancy and Mike.

Brenner didn't react- he never reacted to anything- but he did say, "And what will you do for us in return?"

"Two things." Richie said, trying as hard as he could to be brave, *Be brave, Wheeler, be brave*. "I'll continue doing whatever you want, and I'll try to be quiet during it. Try to shut the fuck up, you know?" He sighed. "And I can make sure nobody ever bothers you about me ever again."

"Oh?"

Richie took a deep breath. “Take me to everyone who’s met me. And I’ll wipe myself from them. Might tire me out, but we’ll go fast. I won’t exist anymore, and… and absolutely nobody will look for me.”

He could tell that tempted Brenner. The idea of having an experiment that nobody would look for, nobody would raise a fuss about. And, if they played their cards right, they could probably study Richie’s powers while he was memory-wiping everyone who’d ever laid eyes on him.

So Brenner agreed.

A few days later, Richie shipped out in a van, dressed in the clothes he was in when he was captured. Couldn’t have people wondering why some kid was wandering around in a hospital gown.

They stopped everywhere in town for the rest of the day- or maybe more than one day? It all went by in a blur- first at the Police Station, and then spreading throughout the town, to everyone. Richie was shocked that they had so much information on him- who his past teachers and classmates were, who he used to be friends with, who saw him at Checkups and Optometry Appointments. Sometimes they had to enter people’s homes, knocking on the door and waiting for someone to open it before Richie wiped their minds, wandering through the house to wipe everybody inside. He stopped at school on the last day, just walking through and wiping all his former classmates and teachers. They went through every building they could, and Richie would walk in, stare someone in the eyes, and then walk off, leaving a cloudy-eyed person behind him, one who no longer had any memory of a second Wheeler boy.

He wiped worried friends, and concerned adults, and people who probably didn’t remember him anyway. And while he worked, the Lab worked, too. Files were deleted. Missing posters were hidden. Any trace of the child’s existence was gone.

Richie sometimes took quick naps in the van while they drove, before he was shaken awake for his next assignment. He was getting more and more tired after each hour, starting to wonder how long he could

keep this up.

It was almost night when they finally pulled up to the old house, the old house that made Richie just feel sad.

"You'll have five minutes after my first wipe." Richie said, stifling a yawn. "We have lots of things packed up for the move. You can probably find the boxes of old family photos and drawings, you can take those and Mom'll just think we lost them in the move. I share a room with Mike, so they'll think all of my stuff is his. Just take anything that has my name on it."

The adults rolled their eyes, but they nodded.

And Richie walked out of the car and entered his house.

He saw his Mom first, who ran over to him, only to stop dead in her tracks as he stared at her and re-wrote the last ten years of her life. It *hurt*, and he was *exhausted*, but he managed.

And then he found his Dad on the couch, and he did the same thing, as the Lab rushed into his house, searching for anything that belonged to him. It was somehow easier to re-write his Dad's memory, which just made him feel sad as well as tired.

Then he went upstairs, and he entered Nancy's room, upset to see that she was crying, hugging her pillow. She looked up, seeing him, and then she leapt to her feet, calling for him, asking where he'd been, did he *know* how worried she'd been, was he okay-

And then he rushed up, hugging her.

"I'm sorry. I should've been watching you." she said quietly.

Richie nodded, and then pulled away, and said, "I love you, Nance."

And then he wiped her memories away, watching as her eyes clouded over and her arms slacked, letting him go.

And as Richie left her room, struggling to stay awake and stay active- knowing that this was the best way, this was his only choice, he *had* to protect them- he walked towards *his* room. His room and his

brother's.

And he entered, and Mike was crying, too. And when Mike looked up and saw him, his tears faded, and he burst into a bright smile, calling out his name and running to him, throwing his arms around him and burying his head in his shirt.

"I missed you so much, I'm so *sorry*!" Mike said, as Richie's heart broke in his chest. Mike pulled away, saying, "Why did you leave? What happened? Are you hurt?" he glanced down, seeing a bruise on his brother's cheek. "Did someone hurt you?"

Richie stared at Mike, and he said, "Mike, I... I have to go away for a while."

Mike stared at him, and then he shook his head, saying, "No! No, you can't leave!"

"It's real important." Richie said, struggling not to cry. "I have to go, Mike, I'm *sorry*..."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you, okay, you just need to trust me, it's gonna be okay. You're gonna be okay, Mikey."

Mike started to cry. "Please, please don't leave me. Please stay, I love you, don't leave."

"Mike..." Richie said, starting to cry himself. "Mike, I love you, too."

Mike paused, glancing up at him, and then he said, "Let me come."

"No, no, Mikey, you *can't*. You can't, I have to go alone, I'm *sorry*..."

And Mike broke away, moving towards his bed, and he grabbed something from under the covers. He walked back towards Richie, and held out their stuffed wolf.

"If you have to go, take it." Mike said, still sobbing. "Please. So you don't forget me."

Richie was about to break.

But he reached out, and he took the wolf, and he said, “I won’t forget you. I love you.”

And then he met his brother’s eyes, and Mike forgot him.

Richie cried all the way back to the Lab, and once he was inside, they brought him to his room, and he cried until he fell asleep.

And then the next morning, the experiments started again.

Weeks passed, months passed, and Richie didn’t enjoy it at all.

He got less punishments, sure, because he learned to shut up. He got hurt during experiments sometimes, but it wasn’t because he was being mouthy. But every day- going through the same routine, wiping and replacing memories and letting them study his brainwaves- got worse and worse as he slowly realized that nobody missed him. Nobody remembered him.

About a month after he’d arrived, Richie was taken into another room, and his hair was cut off, to make the wires easier to strap on. And then he was taken to another room, and given a shot of something that made him fall asleep, and when he woke up, his arm hurt, and he looked down to see a 012 tattooed onto his forearm. He cried harder that night than he normally did, knowing that that was it, he was a subject, he was an experiment, he wasn’t himself anymore. He wasn’t even part of a set this time; he was part of a *collection*. Just one in God knew how many children.

The only thing they’d let him keep was the Wolf. The stuffed wolf, his one reminder of home. That maybe one day he could leave this place, maybe he could return his siblings’ memories- they were working on making him do that.

But a few months in- probably sometime past his tenth birthday, he wasn’t sure- they started pushing for the forcefields more. They wanted him to make a field, to block off things that they’d throw at him.

And he couldn't. Not without touching Mike.

So one day, after a particularly bad experiment- in which they kept *pushing* and *pushing* for a forcefield until he broke and cried and got a shock for his troubles- he decided that he had to leave.

He couldn't stay, they'd find out that he'd lied about his powers and they might capture Mike instead. He didn't want Mike going through this. He couldn't let them. So even if it meant he died alone in the woods somewhere... well, he still had to be brave. He still had to *get out*.

So one day, when he was being escorted through the halls by two bored guards, he said, "Wait."

They glanced down at him, and made the mistake of making eye contact.

And then Richie made a run for the stairs.

It was impossibly easy to get out, but it was harder to be on the run.

He rushed down the stairs, out of the building by the time the alarms went off. Then he just had to wipe the guard at the gate, lean over and push a few buttons, and he was past the fence.

He couldn't go into town, he knew that. Nobody knew who he was, he'd fucked up in that regard, and it was too close to the Lab. So he ran into the woods, slept under trees and trekked through the dirt, getting mud caked onto his bare feet and drenching his hospital gown.

And then he went from town to town, hiding in alleys, stealing food out of dumpsters, knowing that nobody would help him. Nobody *could*.

He stole clothes from a store one night, while it was closed. He took a backpack, too, and got food out of the back of a grocery store. He stole as much makeup as he could, spending hours covering his tattoo so that nobody could see it, so that *he* didn't have to see it. He

showered in gyms and high schools, hitchhiked on trucks and buses, moving as fast as he could. He had no idea where the Lab could be, where the Lab was , if they were nearby or had lost him a while ago.

He was almost eleven when he was hanging out in a park, his hair having almost grown back to the way it was before, and he struck up a conversation with two other boys. They'd asked him about his *Star Wars* T-Shirt, he'd asked them about their school, and finally they asked him if he'd just moved in. He mentioned that he and his family were moving a lot, and he didn't like to stay in one place for too long.

"Oh, well, then, if you move a lot, tell your parents not to go to Derry." said one of the boys, shuddering.

"Derry?" Richie asked.

"Derry, Maine." he said. "We used to live there, until my parents moved out for a new job. It was bad. Nobody there cared about the kids, like, at all. None of the adults cared what we did."

As soon as the boys wandered off, Richie went to the library and researched where to find Derry, Maine.

And then he stole some money and boarded a bus.

The kid was right; not a single adult gave a shit about him in Derry.

Which meant it was the perfect place to hide.

He kept stealing food and clothes, and eventually he found an abandoned house to live in. He got bored one day and decided to go to school- it was better to get friends, he thought, people who might miss him if he got kidnapped. It only took a few memory-rewrites for the teachers to let him in, and he'd had to come up with a name.

So he was Richie Tozier now.

He'd made friends quickly, with the other outcasts. None of the other kids liked him, because he was loud. He allowed himself to be loud,

and obnoxious, and he never shut up. He wouldn't have to shut up here. He'd never have to shut up again.

But he'd made friends with Big Bill, and Stan the Man, and Eds. And after he'd turned thirteen, he became friends with the new kid, Ben Haystack Hanscom, and Bev Marsh, who was a good guy with a sleeve full of cigarettes, and Mike Hanlon, the boy with the biggest heart.

And it was a bit hard to hear Mike's name at first, always turning and expecting to see his own face reflected back at him. But he got used to it. He had to.

There was, of course, the Clown Incident. With IT. And he'd been tormented with a missing poster, showing himself missing, and it was old and gray, and nobody'd replaced it, he was forgotten. They'd all forgotten him. That was his fear, not the fucking clowns. Not even the fucking Lab- he would fight them if he had to, he knew that. He was scared that everyone would forget him again, and he'd have nobody.

When he was fourteen, he got a job, working in the storage room of the grocery store. Not only could he legally buy things now, he could sometimes smuggle some food out so he could buy himself nice things- a book, or some cigarettes to share with Bev, or a video game.

He'd made up parents for himself. Wentworth Tozier was nice and made jokes and encouraged his odd voices, but was always at work, and Maggie Tozier liked him fine enough but wanted a girl, and couldn't understand this loud boy who was thrown into her life. He lied sometimes, too, saying that they'd forgotten to pack his lunch when he hadn't managed to smuggle some food out, saying that they wouldn't allow him to have a phone when Eddie asked for his number.

The only one who found out was Bill. One day Richie was sick, and Bill went to his house to bring him candy. Only he'd had to break in the back, because Richie was listening to an old CD player he'd stolen and couldn't hear him at the door. And Bill had discovered the abandoned house, the lack of adults and food and care, and confronted Richie. Richie considered just wiping his memory and

sending him away, but... but he *hated* using that power. It just reminded him of going around, wiping his memory away from everybody who knew him, so that he could die in a Lab somewhere.

So he spilled. Told him he could wipe memories, and he was on the run, and to not tell anybody *please*. Bill had been upset, but he agreed not to tell the Losers, that it was Richie's secret to share, but to *please* consider telling them.

But he couldn't. It wasn't that he didn't trust them; you can't just kill a demon and not trust the people you kill it with. But he didn't want them to know. To know that he was a coward who'd done what the Lab wanted. To know that he'd abandoned his family. To know that nobody would miss him.

One day, they were sitting in the Underground Clubhouse, playing some kind of get-to-know-you game. And Stan had asked, "Here's a hard one: what do you regret most?"

Everyone knew Bill's regret, so they skipped him. Bev regretted not killing her son-of-a-bitch Dad sooner. Ben regretted letting other people control his self-esteem, Mike regretted all those years he spent blaming himself for his parents' death, Eddie regretted all the years he spent under his Mom's control.

Richie wasn't sure what he regretted most. Going to the van in the first place? Agreeing to wipe his loved ones' memories so that they couldn't get hurt, when he should have known that it was only a matter of time before he had to flee the Lab anyway? Going down into that fucking Shed and getting his brother and sister infected with superpowers?

He paused when it was his turn, glancing around at everyone's expectant faces. Bill looked worried, as if he wasn't sure what Richie would say.

Finally, Richie decided on something.

"I regret losing my stuffed wolf." he said, and then laughed it off. "Left it behind at a Summer Camp."

He'd left his last reminder of home, left it at the Lab.

It wasn't his biggest regret, but it certainly did make him want to cry.

26. Everyone has to process the Last Few Chapters

Notes for the Chapter:

This one's a bit short. Flashback writing took a while
lol

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Everyone has to process the Last Few Chapters

“Holy shit.” Lucas whispered to himself.

They all looked up at Richie, who was glancing inbetween them. Finally, he said, “I can... I can try to bring back your memories, but it’s a lot more exhausting than re-writing, and...” He let out a yawn, then glanced down at the ground. “Looks like the Superspeed wore off...”

“You wiped us, too?” Will asked quietly.

Richie nodded. “Walked into the school building and into each classroom. Almost passed out by the end. You guys didn’t know me much, just as Mikey’s weirdo twin-” he paused, glancing between Max, Kali and Steve. “Never met you guys before now, though, so you’re fine.”

His eyes fell on the Losers, and he instantly glanced away, not wanting to see their reaction. “I... I shoulda told you, but... but, *shit*, I...”

Bev jumped to her feet first, and she rushed forwards, throwing her arms around Richie. Mike moved next, followed by Bill, and then they were all hugging. Richie paused for a second, and then slowly started to cry.

“Stan’s gonna be pissed.” Bev whispered, as she hugged her friend tighter.

“He’ll get over it.” Mike muttered.

After the Losers pulled away, they all looked towards Nancy, and the Party followed their gazes. Richie refused to look at her, not wanting to know how she’d reacted, *fearing* how she’d reacted... he’d forced her to forget him, forced her to forget her brother, she couldn’t forgive him, she *couldn’t*...

“So, you are my brother?”

Her voice was almost emotionless. Of course it was. She hated him now, she had to. Slowly, he nodded.

“What’s your name?”

Richie paused. “I... I think I like Richie better. Used it a bit more. You can just...”

He was about to stand up, to walk away, to get away from her so she wouldn’t have to see him cry...

And then she grabbed his shoulder, turned him around, and hugged him, too.

And Richie just kept sobbing.

“I’m so sorry.” Nancy said. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s my fault, it’s my fault, it’s-” Richie began.

“Stop it, *it’s okay*.” Nancy said. “*It’s okay* .”

She hugged him for a while, as he cried, and she said, “It’s okay,” as much as she needed. She glanced to the Losers, and after a minute, they joined the hug again.

After a minute, Richie’s tears slowed, and Nancy said, “You tire yourself out?”

Richie nodded, as Bill said, “Two p-powers causes him to t-t-tire easily.”

“Why don’t we go back down to the secret room,” Nancy said, glancing at everyone else, who were currently not entirely sure what they should be doing, “And let Richie take a nap, and then we’ll figure out what to do from there?”

They nodded, and started trickling out. Nancy and Richie went last, slowly pulling away from the hug as they walked; Richie still gripped onto his sister’s arm, looking up at the Losers ahead of them.

“I missed you.” he finally said.

Nancy didn’t respond, but she squeezed his hand, and he smiled a little.

“My Mom just texted,” Jonathan said, looking around at everyone in the hidden room, “She’ll be here with Hop in the morning.”

They all looked up at him, nodding. Richie was leaning on Nancy, having fallen asleep. Nancy was staring down at him, concern and sadness in her eyes.

El glanced over at them, and then back at Kali, who was sitting next to her, also watching Nancy. “Mike’s gonna be surprised he has a brother.” El said.

“I’m surprised that *we* have a brother.” Kali said. “He’s one of us, you know?”

“Ugh, don’t say that, that makes *Mike* my brother by extention.”

“Ooh, you’re right, I fucked that up.”

El smirked a little, and added, “And it’d make Nancy your sister, and you wouldn’t like that, would you?”

“What? What, why would you- shut *up* !” Kali said, as El stifled her giggles.

After a second, though, El stopped laughing, glancing between Richie and the ground.

Kali quietly said, “You want to visit Mike again?”

She nodded.

“Just remember, we’re getting him out tomorrow. We’re getting him out.”

“I know.”

“Alright. Let me know if you need anything.”

And then everything in the room disappeared again, and El put a makeshift blindfold over her eyes, and slipped into the Void.

When she focused on Mike, she didn’t hear crying or screaming, which she supposed was a good thing.

But the silence was... very eerie.

She slowly turned, seeing Mike laying on a bed- he was probably in a room, but in the Void, he was just sitting on a white mattress, surrounded by blackness. El slowly approached, waiting for him to move or make a noise. He didn’t.

She felt, deep in her heart, that something was wrong.

“Mike?” she asked, knowing that it was a bit unlikely that he could hear her, but not caring at the moment. “Mike?”

Mike was curled up, staring at nothing, his face oddly blank. He wasn’t crying, and she tried to convince herself that was good, that he wasn’t being hurt, but... he just seemed so *empty*, something was *clearly wrong*...

“Mike?”

Something in Mike’s eyes lit, very slightly, and El gasped; he’d heard her, she *knew* it, he could hear her-

And then he shut his eyes and curled up tighter.

“Mike, it’s me. It’s El. We’re coming. We’ll be there soon.”

He still didn’t respond, just curling in tighter and breathing shallowly.

“Mike? We’ll be there for you. We’re here.”

He had to be hearing her, he *had* to be. But he still didn’t respond.

“Are you okay?”

Forgetting about the physics of the Void for a second, El reached forwards to grab his head, and then flinched back as her hand went through nothing. Slowly, Mike disappeared in a cloud of smoke, still looking *blank*.

El took off the blindfold, shaking slightly.

“How is he?” Kali asked, slowly letting the rest of the room return to her sister’s senses.

El looked up at her, slowly, and then she said, “I don’t *know*.”

27. Joyce and Hopper have no clue what their kids have been doing

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Joyce and Hopper have no clue what their kids have been doing

Will and Kali were upstairs early the next morning, waiting for their parents in the living room.

“What happens if someone arrives at the house,” Will asked quietly, “And it’s *not* them?”

“Then we beat the shit outta them.” Kali shrugged. “I make them think we’re invisible, and you grab whatever you want outta your color-bag and murder them.”

“Murder?”

“Or incapacitate. I’ve got a gun if we need to kill-”

“Where the *hell* did you get a gun?”

“Not important.”

They sat for a little longer, as Will said, “So... apparently I completely forgot Mike had a twin brother.”

“Yeah, that’s pretty wild.”

“What am I gonna tell Mom? She won’t remember him, either.”

“Richie’ll probably give them their memories back, eventually.”

Will paused, and then said, “What the *fuck* are we gonna tell his parents?”

Kali hesitated. “That *will* be a bit of an issue.”

“They don’t even know *any* of their kids have powers, and if Richie gives them their memories back, what’s he gonna tell them? That he got kidnapped and convinced to wipe their memories?”

“I guess... we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” Kali said hesitantly.

They were silent for another minute, before Kali said, “Are you gonna be okay?”

“Huh?”

“Going into the... the Lab?”

Will paused. “I... I think so. You?”

“So long as I get to kill someone.”

“I... doubt El’s gonna like that. She doesn’t like the whole ‘murder’ thing.”

“She’ll get over it.”

They heard a tapping at the door, and they instantly sat up. Slowly, Will pulled his bag up, grabbing onto a red item and hovering his hand above it, just in case, as Kali moved towards the door.

And then she opened it, and sighed with relief. “Hop! Ms. Byers!”

“Hey!” Hopper said, as Kali stepped back and Will dropped his bag, running to throw his arms around his Mom. “You all doing okay?”

“Absolutely.” Kali said. “Everyone’s hiding in the basement, waiting for us. We can introduce you to the newbies, we might be adopting them.”

“If you say so.” Joyce said, smiling a little as she hugged her son. “And once you do, we... might have a new plan.”

“Do you think we can go up?” Jonathan asked, glancing up at the

ceiling.

"If it's actually them, Kali'll call us up to the Living Room." Steve reminded him. "I doubt we could fit even more people in here."

They glanced around at everyone; they were all anxiously waiting, with Richie still leaning on Nancy. El was in the corner, a blindfold tied around her eyes as she fiddled with her shirt.

Finally, there was a tapping on the ceiling, and Kali opened up the trapdoor. "Alright, dipshits, come meet our parents."

"Whoo!" Dustin cheered, climbing up first, as Max and Lucas shepherded the Losers out.

"Don't worry, they're super cool." Max said, as Bev glanced at her worriedly. "There's like a 95% chance that Ms. Byers'll adopt you by the end of the day."

"See? We're good." Steve said, holding out a hand to help his boyfriend to his feet, before they rushed up with everyone else.

Kali, however, descended, sitting in front of El as she took the blindfold off, looking dejected. "Anything to report?"

"No, and that's the *problem* ." El said, as she stood up. "Mike just seems..." She didn't have the words to describe it, and she *hated* that, she *hated* not being able to speak... "Lost."

"Don't worry. We're getting him out." Kali said, smiling at her sister as she helped her out. "We're getting him out and we're going home and then this will all be over. Now, come on. Let's go say hello to our Police Chief."

"Mom!"

"Dad!"

Jonathan and El both rushed to their respective parents, as the rest of the Party waved greetings. Richie clung to Nancy's arm, watching

warily as the adults said Hellos and hugged their kids.

“Hey, it’s okay.” Nancy said quietly to him. “It’s okay, they’ll love you.”

“They’ll hate me.”

“Literally none of us hate you, Wheeler.” Nancy laughed.

Joyce finally looked up, noticing the Losers, who were also sticking a bit close to Nancy and Richie. “You must be the new powered kids.” she said, her voice softening a bit.

They nodded, as Bill said, “I’m B-B-Bill, this is Bev, Mike and Richie.”

Joyce and Hopper nodded at the kids, though their gazes lingered on Richie for a bit- that was to be expected.

“Yeah, uh, about Richie...” Nancy said, before glancing down at the kid. “You wanna tell them, or...”

Richie turned to them. “I’m Mike’s secret twin.”

There was a beat, before Lucas says, “Wow, that was a lot shorter of an explanation than we got.”

Joyce and Hopper glanced at each other, and then Richie added, “Yeah, uh, got memory-erasing powers as well as Power Mimicry, so... that’s why you don’t know I exist.”

“We can... you can explain that to us later, I guess.” Hopper said after a second. “Now, who wants to hear how we’re taking down the fucking Lab?”

The kids cheered, and Joyce and Hopper immediately moved to the nearest table. Joyce pulled a paper out of her pocket, unfolding it and placing it down; it seemed to be some kind of diagram. “Now, we gave you the blueprints to the Lab,” she said, “ *But* we were in the Castle a few days ago, and Erica wanted to read *everything*- you sure have an energetic sister, Lucas.”

“That’s one way to describe her.” Lucas said.

“But,” Joyce said, “She found a book there, and it just so happened to be a history of *this town*.”

“How do you have a History of Derry in your... sorry, a castle?” Hanlon asked, as everyone glanced to each other.

“Castle Byers, it’s our hideout.” Will said.

“Well, most of our books were from when we were teens, so it’s not a very *updated* history.” Hopper said. “But this one was a special interest for one of our old friends, he used to grow up here. Was convinced that there was some kinda curse, making the adults not give a shit when kids died.”

“Well...” Bev said hesitantly. “That’s kinda... not wrong?”

“Yeah, there seemed to be some kind of horrible tragedy happening here every thirty-or-so years.” Hopper said.

“Every tw-twenty-seven.” Bill said. As they all glanced at him, Bill said, “N-n-not important, go on.”

“*But*, it turns out that the Department of Energy’s new Lab isn’t in a new building.” Joyce said. “At least, from what I believe. Would they be...” she pulled out another sheet of paper, placing it over the first one, revealing an old map of Derry; she pointed at an area, finishing, “About here?”

“Y-yeah.” Bill said. “That’s wh-where it is.”

“Right, well, it used to be an insane asylum.” Hopper said. “Until it got shut down about thirty years ago. They must’ve set up there.”

“Our *good news*,” Joyce said, tossing the map away and showing them the diagram again, “Is that this asylum just so happened to have some secret tunnels underneath. The Doctors were paranoid of a revolt or some shit, so they had these built.”

“Secret Tunnels?” Dustin asked, excited.

“Are you suggesting we sneak in through these?” Steve asked carefully.

“It’s called the Element of Surprise, Harrington.” Hopper said.

“It’s called, ‘If this was in a History Book, the Lab definitely knows about it.’” Steve replied.

“Well, I assume you all have a distraction planned?” Hopper asked, glancing between them.

“Yeah, Jonathan built bombs.” Dustin said.

“How did-” Joyce began.

“We were gonna blow up some stuff in front of the Lab, attract their attention while we search the higher floors.” Jonathan interrupted.

“Well, I feel like utilizing secret tunnels might help.” Hopper said.

“I can get us past any guards without raising an alarm, so long as the security cameras are down.” Richie volunteered.

“I can handle the security cameras.” Dustin said. “Easy as pie.”

“I could even get us past some guards,” Max said, “But we’ll be in trouble soon as we reach the upper floors, cause my speed doesn’t work while opening their doors.”

“We’ll just have to go fast.” Nancy said. “And then once we find a captive, we’ll send them back to the tunnels with Max- would someone wait in the tunnels with everyone until we all arrive?”

“I’d be fine doing that.” Steve said.

“We can figure out who’s joining you later.” Nancy said, before turning back to the adults. “I think we’ve got a plan, then. When are we going in?”

“They’ll have Guard Rotations around Seven.” Kali said. “I think that’d be a good time to go.”

“So,” El interrupted loudly, getting everyone’s attention directed towards her, “We’re going in tonight?”

They all nodded.

As everyone helped Joyce and Hopper fold up the papers, Richie pulled Nancy aside.

“Something wrong?” Nancy asked, looking worried.

Richie paused, glancing up at his sister- *his sister* - and saying, “Uh... before we go in, I wanna... Nance, I wanna try bringing back some memories... you know?”

Nancy glanced down at him, surprise flickering across her gaze, as she asked, “Are you sure? Won’t it... tire you out?”

“Well, we’ve got a few hours. Might as well try to make some people remember me.” Richie said softly.

After a second, Nancy nodded. “Okay. Okay, that’s... let’s try.”

Richie smiled, and then looked up at Nancy. Once their eyes met, both clouded over.

The first one who noticed was El, who turned and saw both Nancy and Richie with clouded eyes. Surprised, she dropped the paper she’d been helping Joyce with, and that made everyone turn to follow her gaze.

“What the *fuck* ?” Hopper said, as Joyce gasped.

“Oh, uh, that’s his powers in action.” Hanlon said. “Rewriting Memories.”

“Yeah, um, does somebody want to explain that to me?” Joyce asked.

“Uh, so Mike had a twin, that’s Richie.” Max said carefully. “And the Lab got him and made him wipe everyone’s minds of his existence so they could do whatever they wanted to him. He escaped and ended up... well, here.”

“That’s quite a coincidence.” Joyce said.

“Not r-really.” Bill said. “Richie came h-here because the adults d-don’t care about the kids, and he wouldn’t get f-found out. The L-Lab might’ve had the same mentality.”

“Or they might’ve shown up because we kept getting spotted.” Bev said quietly.

“What?” Hanlon said quickly, shaking his head. “No, no, it’s not our-”

Before anyone could say anything else, there was something... something *wrong*.

There was a ripple throughout the group as they all doubled over, screeching as some sort of burst of light passed through the room. Richie and Nancy broke contact, with Richie staggering back and throwing his hands to his ears. Nancy, eyes still cloudy, toppled over, and Kali managed to catch her before she hit the ground.

“What the *fuck*?” Lucas screeched.

All of the sudden, Bev let out a piercing shriek, and everyone froze; it was more than a shriek of pain- it was a scream of *pure horror*.

What scared them even more was after a second, the other Losers followed suit.

And all four of them started to bleed.

“What the *fuck*?” someone yelled- probably Max, but El wasn’t paying attention. She just looked to the Losers, who were all screaming and staring at their hands, which had a cut across them sliced open, bleeding onto the floor.

“What’s going on?” Jonathan asked, dropping to his knees in front of Richie, who was the closest, and examining his palm.

The Losers looked to each other, all seeming to understand something, and Bev started to cry, “I can’t do this. I can’t do this, not now, not again, *no!*”

“Not now, not *now!*!” Hanlon yelled.

“No, no, this isn’t happening,” Bill said. “This isn’t *happening!*”

“Fuck! We’re *fucked!* We’re *fucked!*” Richie screeched.

“What is *going on?*” El finally spoke up.

None of them replied; they only screamed and sobbed.

28. Remember when there were two chapters in Part I “Everything Goes to Shit”? Well...

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Remember when there were two chapters in Part I “Everything Goes to Shit”? Well...

Mike was woken up early and dragged out into the hall, and he didn't care .

He didn't even care anymore what they did to him- if they just wanted to test, wanted him to make fields, just wanted to use him has a punching bag. It didn't *matter* . Nothing *mattered* .

He only barely processed, however, one of the Guards saying, “Alright, kid. You better behave today. We're gonna try something special.”

Whatever.

He opened the door that led to the testing room, and Mike followed him inside, still being dragged along, still staring ahead.

Then he opened the door beside the glass, and Mike entered the room, and then he stopped.

Ben.

Ben looked up from the corner, startled to see Mike standing in front of him. He called out, standing up quickly as the door shut again. “What happened? Are you okay?”

Mike just stared, his thoughts slowly catching up to him.

I'm in here with Ben.

Something special today.

Experiments. With Ben.

Both in the same room.

He shut his eyes, trying to think, *Which one of us are they hurting, and who are they punishing?*

Not as if it matters.

“Mike? Are you alright?”

He felt a hand brush his; Ben must have moved closer to him, trying to read his energy or some shit. Ben didn’t say anything after that, probably trying to figure out what was wrong.

The door opened again, and Mike heard Ben yell, “*Stan!*”

“Ben!”

The boys hugged behind him, as Ben said, “Are you okay? Do you know what’s going on?”

“I don’t know , they just said we were doing something different today...”

“Fuck, you don’t think...”

“Think *what?*”

Three of them were in one room, one training room. Either they were going to be all punished for something- probably for something Eddie did, he was still fighting anything that came near him- or... or they were just to be tested together.

How would they all be tested together?

Oh. OH.

They’re going to have us fight.

Mike slowly sunk to the ground, opening his eyes again to stare at the wall.

“Mike? What’s up with him?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know, I think... I think they did something to him, but he’s not drugged again...”

And then the door opened a third time, and Mike heard a very familiar shout.

“-pieces of shit! You *dickholes* are going to *fucking die* as soon as I get out of this *room!*”

“Eddie!” Ben called, and then Eddie turned, shocked.

“Stan! Ben!” he said, running to hug his friends. And then, after a second, he spotted Mike, his face falling. “Mike?” When Mike failed to respond, Eddie asked, “What did they *do* ?”

They then heard a scientist from behind the glass. “Alright, everyone here?”

“Can’t you *count*, you sack of shit?” Eddie yelled. “What the fuck did you do to Mike?”

“Kaspbrak, could you *please* be a bit more polite?”

In response, Eddie flipped off the glass. “When I’m *dead*, I’ll be cussing you out in the afterlife!” Eddie said.

Then Mike heard Brenner’s voice. “Alright. We’re doing something different today.”

Mike felt a slight clench in his stomach, but otherwise, he barely processed what was going on, only figuring out he should stand up as Eddie continued to lobby curses towards the doctors.

Once Eddie paused to take a breath, Brenner said, “We’re all here today to see exactly what Hanscom can do.”

Stan and Eddie slowly turned to stare at Ben, who was trying his best not to look terrified.

“Do you remember the experiment we tried a few days ago?”

Ben paused. “I... I almost... that guy almost... are you sure...?” He sounded... well, he sounded *terrified*. “Are you sure? I almost...”

“What are you *doing*?” Stan asked, a quiver of fear in his voice.

Brenner replied, “We’re going to see how an excess of energy effects you three.”

“You son of a *bitch!*” Eddie yelled, nearly throwing himself at the glass, as Ben barely managed to grab him and hold him back. “Fuck off! We’re not some fucking toys for you to mess around with! Fuck off!”

“Eddie, *please*, it’s okay.” Ben tried to say, his words coming out in a pitch that still betrayed his fear. “Eddie, it’s alright, I’ll... I’ll do some energy things, just calm down for-”

“I’m not *calming* down ! I’m not gonna let them fuck us over.”

“Would you prefer to be restrained for this experiment?” Brenner asked, and Eddie froze for a second. “We’d be happy to strap you to something so you don’t make a mess.”

Eddie glared through the glass, as he said again, “What did you *do* to Mike?”

“Wheeler has simply realized he shouldn’t fight us.” Brenner responded. “Now, settle down, or we will restrain you.”

Eddie glanced towards Stan briefly, before pulling away from Ben and glaring at the ground.

“Alright,” said another one of the scientists. “Hanscom, start with the Wheeler kid. See what you can do with his energy, and then move onto the others. See how much you can do without passing out.”

Ben slowly turned, staring at Mike. Mike simply stared back, still looking completely lost. And then Ben held out his hand, facing his palm towards his friend, as he mouthed, *I’m sorry*.

Mike felt something warm in his stomach, something spreading. He stared at Ben still as he felt energy start to spread across his body,

start to warm him up. It wasn't exactly a pleasant feeling, but it wasn't *bad* - but that might have just been his resignation clouding his emotions.

"Something's off." Ben muttered, only barely audible.

"Ben?" Stan asked, still looking worried.

"Something's... blocked." Ben said. "In Mike's mind. Something's blocked, let me see if I can..."

But as the energy started to build, it started to... hurt. Mike felt bumps on his skin, prickles under the surface, as if something was trying to burst out of him. He shut his eyes, trying to slow his breathing, trying to stop whatever was happening.

"Ben, stop it, you're hurting him."

"I... *fuck*, I'm *trying* to stop."

Mike thought he heard someone call out for him, and that was when he realized that something was wrong with his hearing. He reached up towards his ears, only to suddenly be able to hear *everything* - in a burst of sound, he could hear the breathing of the boys in the room, he could hear the sound of the air in the vents, the shuffling of papers, the clicking of keys, the tapping of shoes, and he could hear Eddie screaming, trying to figure out what was going on.

Everything was sounding at once, clanging in his ears, and Mike dropped again, letting out a screech that did *not* help his sensory overload. Ben screamed, too, but he didn't stop- or *couldn't* stop.

"What's going on?" Eddie yelled. "What's happening?"

In that instant, Mike managed to catch a glimpse of Ben shooting out a hand towards Eddie, and suddenly Eddie doubled over, glowing a slight gold- or maybe something was just wrong with Mike's vision?

"Hanscom, stop." he heard over the loudspeaker, but Ben didn't, and after a second, Stan screamed, too, dropping to the ground. "Stop!"

"Something's *wrong!*" Ben managed to scream over everyone else.

“Something’s wrong!”

Ben needs help. Ben needs help. Something’s wrong with Ben!

But Mike couldn’t do anything. He could just curl in on himself as he screamed.

Suddenly, Ben threw himself back into the wall, and something burst from him, some kind of light, breaking through them all and flying out of the room. Eddie and Stan dropped to the ground with a final scream, and he thought he heard something snap from Stan’s direction. Suddenly, the pain stopped, and Mike was on the ground, breathing rapidly, trying to regain himself.

And then something unlocked in his mind. The energy had broken something, broken a barrier.

Holy shit.

Holy shit!

The wolf...

And then Eddie screamed.

Slowly, Mike looked up, as Stan started screaming, too, a sob bursting from his throat. Ben also looked down, frozen.

All Mike could do was stare at their hands.

Each of their palms had been sliced open, blood bursting from their cuts and trickling onto the ground.

Mike thought he heard one of the doctors over the loudspeaker, asking *what* had just occurred. Ben started talking quickly. “Something happened, something happened, I don’t know *what*, I’m sorry, I... I think... I think there were too many people here, I think I did something when I tried to unblock his head, I think my powers overloaded, I...”

Stan’s screams finally got louder than Ben’s chatter, but it didn’t sound pained, it sounded... *terrified*.

“Calm down!” came a doctor’s voice. “Uris, calm down!”

Stan looked up, anger filling his face. “You *bastards!*” he screamed. “You bastards! *YOU WOKE IT UP!*”

The door opened, and guards ran in, dragging them out. Eddie was oddly quiet, staring down at his hand as it bled onto the floor. Ben looked up as the guards approached, terror paralyzing him. Mike felt himself hoisted to his feet as the guards rushed him into the hall. But he heard Stan still screaming, trying to push the guards away.

“*Do you know what you just did? Get your fucking hands off of me!*”

As the boys were pulled down the hall, Mike turned, seeing Stan being pulled behind them. He was fighting now, kicking and screaming. “*Get away from me! Get away from me!*”

Then, as he jolted back, something fell out from beneath his gown and toppled to the floor.

It looked... it looked almost like a harness, only the connectors had been snapped, probably from the force of the energy blast.

Everyone stared for a half a second, and then Eddie screamed, “*Go! Go!*” As Stan looked up at him, panicked, Eddie said, “Come back for us later! Get out now! *Go!*”

And then the Guards holding Stan, as they tried to back up with him, screamed, and Stan’s talons burst forth, clawing their hands away from him. Stan turned to run, and as he did, something seemed to be growing from his back...

And just before he turned the bend, two wings burst from Stan’s gown, shredding holes in the fabric. Mike got a nice view of two large eagle wings, each twice the size of him and hard for Stan to fit into the hall, before his Guards started running.

He was dragged down the hall as he heard alarms start to blast and saw Guards race past him, going after Stan. But as Mike glanced down, still quite overstimulated, he also saw drops of blood on the ground, blood from the hands of his friends.

He was shoved into the first room that had a lock, hearing it click behind him before his guards raced off, probably to join the others in trying to catch Stan. Mike glanced around, briefly taking in that he was in the room with the toy chest, the gathering room, before he sunk to the ground, still reeling.

Mike couldn't process anything; what had just *happened*? His friends were bleeding and screaming and he didn't... he didn't know *why*.

But it did do *something* right.

Ben had tried to unblock his memories, and in the process accidentally overwhelmed himself. But it had worked. It had *worked*.

Slowly, Mike made his way over to the toy chest, opening it and picking up the wolf. It was a lot dirtier than he remembered, a lot less cared-for, but he still *remembered* it.

He remembered someone else, too.

And, very quietly, he whispered, "I remember you."

Stan was *out*, but he sure as hell wasn't free.

It was so easy to escape once he'd gotten his wings back. He rushed down a hall, opening a window and leaping out, letting the wind carry him over the fence before the soldiers could even draw guns on him. He flew for a long while, ducking between branches and leaves, but refusing to stop- firstly, to put as much distance between himself and the Lab as possible, but, more importantly, because he was *flying* again. And goddamnit if he wasn't going to fly as much as he could.

He finally stopped in a tree which was big enough to let him perch comfortably on a branch, and he leaned back, letting his wings wrap around him to protect himself from the cold. He shivered for a while, wondering if he should go full-bird for a while to hide himself better. That might be a good idea, but he was feeling *exhausted* right now, and he doubted an extra transformation would help.

Still, he probably shouldn't just be sitting in the open woods, not

with the Lab out there, and with...

With...

Stan slowly looked down at the cut on his hand; the bleeding had thankfully slowed, slowly healing itself over.

He knew what that meant. He knew as soon as he saw the cut on his hand what that energy blast had done. And he didn't for one *second* blame Ben; it was the Lab who pushed him to it, the Lab who wanted to see what he could do, the Lab that... that *woke IT up*.

"You fucking bastards," Stan whispered to himself, "You woke IT up."

He heard a rustle in the bushes below and jumped, immediately perching himself on the branch in a position that enabled him to be prepared for a fast takeoff, his wings spreading out.

And then he heard the voice.

"Didn't have wings the last time I saw you, did you, Stanny?"

Stan froze, trying as hard as he could to be brave, brave like the others.

"Go away."

"Don't you want to see the clown?"

Stan instantly flew off, flew away, flying as far as he could from whatever was waiting for him on the forest floor.

And he'd keep flying until he found another tree, one with roots big enough to sleep under, and in the morning, he'd start off to find his friends, starting with the Underground Clubhouse, they'd probably be there now.

But as he took off, took off flying away from whatever the *fuck* IT had become now, he spotted the red balloon on the forest floor.

I have to warn them.

They woke IT up.

29. The Party breaks and enters

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Party breaks and enters

“What the *fuck* is going on?” Kali yelled.

The Losers had been moved to the couch, while Nancy still tried to regain herself, her eyes still very clouded over.

“It’s... It’s...” Bill said, struggling to get the words out.

The Losers looked to each other; everyone was still recovering from their tears, and Bev had buried her head into Hanlon’s shoulder, refusing to look anyone in the eye. Finally, Richie said, “When we were... thirteen, we made a blood pact. There was... a monster in town, and we thought we’d killed it, but we said if it wasn’t dead we’d come back and finish it, but... our wounds just opened up, and that can only mean...”

“Does this... monster... have anything to do with the Lab?” El asked cautiously.

“N-n-not that I’m aware of.” Bill said.

“And you think it’s back?” Will asked, glancing pointedly towards Bev.

“It’s gotta be.” Hanlon said.

“Well...” Joyce said, and the kids all turned to her. “How dangerous is it?”

The Losers all flinched. “Very.”

“How so?”

They considered for a second, glancing towards each other, before

Bev said, “Well, it kinda... eats kids?”

“Really, it just eats easy prey, but that makes kids a pretty good target.” Hanlon said. “IT should only come around every twenty-seven years, but... well, something might’ve just happened...”

“What should we do?” Kali asked, glancing between everyone. “We can’t let this thing keep running around, but we need to get the others out of the Lab.”

“We’re not delaying the plan.” El said stubbornly. “We *can’t*.”

“We c-can’t leave the others tr-trapped in one place if I-IT’s running around.” Bill added fearfully.

“IT’ll go after them.” Richie agreed, his face paling. “They’ll be all alone, they’ll be such easy targets, goddamnit...”

“So, how about this?” Hopper said, as everyone glanced towards him. “We break in, get our kids out, and then once we’ve recovered, we go kill the monster. Where is it?”

“Usually the sewers.” Richie responded.

“Is it some kinda rat?” Jonathan asked.

“It’s a shapeshifter, but it’s mainly a clown.” Hanlon explained.

“Sorry, *what?*” Lucas asked.

“It’s also kindof an alien.” Richie said.

“I think that was just your hallucination, Rich.” Bev said quietly.

“I had it, too.” Hanlon said.

“So,” Dustin interrupted, as everyone glanced to him, “We’ve got that? We go in, get our friends out, and *then* kill this... thing?”

They paused, as the Losers glanced to each other. Finally, Bev said, “What else *can* we do?”

Before anyone could add anything else, they heard Nancy quietly

whisper, “The fuck is going on?”

Richie shot up, rushing over to her, staring up in a slight panic, as she rubbed her eyes, which weren’t clouded anymore. “Nance? Are you okay? Did I fuck up?”

She looked down at him, as he looked worriedly up at her, and everyone else froze over, wondering exactly what would happen. Finally, she smiled slightly. “You little shit,” she whispered, “We looked for you for *days*. And then you just go and wipe our memories? God, at least leave a note.”

Richie stared up at her, tears growing in his eyes. “It... it worked?”

Nancy leaned forwards and hugged him again, smiling slightly. “Yes, yes, yes, it worked. It worked, it worked.”

And for a moment, Richie finally smiled, his face lighting up as he hugged his sister.

Then, Nancy asked, “So, your weekly nickname is Richie, huh?”

“Been a bit longer than a week.”

“Doesn’t matter.”

After another second, Max said, “Uh, are we packing up, or...?”

“We’re here to give the rest of you a rundown.”

Lucas glanced up, to see Bill and Hanlon entering the boys’ room. Will was in the corner with Jonathan and Joyce- the latter of whom had come in to help her boys re-pack and get everything into the van for a quick getaway. Dustin was sitting with Steve as they finished packing up their own stuff.

“Rundown?” Will asked cautiously.

“Yeah, Richie and B-Bev are giving the g-g-girls the same speech.” Bill said. “It’s about the m-monster. We need to t-t-tell you what we

know, in case i-i-it shows up.”

“Which it will.” Hanlon said. “It totally will. The first thing you’ve gotta know is that IT is drawn to fear- that’s what it feeds on.”

“Feeds on?” Joyce asked.

“It can sh-shapeshift into y-y-your worst nightmare,” Bill said, “And then s-s-suck out your soul a-a-and e-eat your corpse.”

“Well, that’s pleasant.” Dustin muttered.

“What even *is* this thing?” Steve asked.

The teens considered. “Well,” Hanlon said, “We’re pretty sure it’s some kind of alien, but it might be an eldritch monstrosity.”

“Since it f-f-feeds on fear,” Bill said, “And it r-r-really hates us for al-almost killing it a while ago, our f-f-friends will be sitting ducks. I-IT might even be there now.”

“So, what exactly do we do about it?” Lucas asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Don’t g-g-give into it.” Bill said.

“Overcome your fear, and try to wound it. We beat the shit outta it last time, and Richie thinks that it might get wounded by silver.” Hanlon said. “Also, we hallucinated a ritual thing that might kill it-don’t ask, really long story involving a lotta smoke- but leave that to us.”

“Jesus Christ.” Jonathan muttered.

“If you see IT, just hold it off long enough for one of us Losers.” Hanlon shrugged. “We know how to handle this son of a bitch.”

They glanced towards each other, but nodded.

“God,” Bill muttered, as everyone finished packing up, “Why couldn’t this just b-b-be an easy rescue?”

As they all rushed outside, running across the lawn, Lucas stopped and said, “Wait.”

They all turned towards him- still holding their packed bags, all ready to storm the Lab- and he continued, “We should... we should all transform. So that we have maximum energy for this- you know?”

“That makes sense.” Max nodded, as everyone glanced around.

“Um, I think I’ll leave that to you.” Joyce said, stepping back a little. “I haven’t transformed all my life, and even if I could, I think I’d be alright just... not.”

Hopper nodded his agreement.

“Jonathan?” Will asked, looking up at his brother. “Can you and Steve...?”

The two teenagers glanced to each other, and Steve said, “Uh... yeah, yeah, we just haven’t... often... yeah, let’s do it.”

Max was the first one to transform- she’d already been flapping her hands as everyone talked, and in a flash, she was in full Zoomer wear. The rest of the Party followed after that, and Nancy released Richie’s hand for a second to transform herself.

“See, it’s not *actually* one color,” she was explaining to a very interested Will as Bev, Bill and Hanlon started attempting their own transformations. “I use my fire and red swirls show up. It’s pretty sick- Steve! Slow down!”

Will turned to see Steve moving some kind of air between his hands, which were held above each other instead of side-to-side. “Sorry,” he said, “Gravity and shit- think I got it!”

He clapped his hands, and with a flash, he was covered in blue and blue-grey. “This good?”

“That looks *fucking awesome, dude!*” Dustin cheered, rushing up. “You should’ve shown us before!”

Will glanced towards Jonathan, who was also pressing his hands together, in much the way that gave Will his own transformation. Jonathan smiled towards him, and in another blast of energy, he was dressed in black, white and gray. He lifted a bag off the floor, gesturing over so Will could run and see its contents- they were all old polaroids. “My weapons.” he said, as Will beamed. “Got the idea of a carrier bag from you.”

“Bitchin.” he said, just as Kali managed to coat herself in her purple transformation energy.

Finally, Nancy turned towards Richie, who was standing in the middle of it all. “You okay, buddy?” Richie paused, glancing down at his hands. “Uh, if you don’t want to transform...”

“No, I... I think I’d like to, it’s just... do I use my power mimicry? My memory-wipe? *Can I use my memory wipe? I... how do I even...?*”

Will moved quickly, rushing over and grabbing Richie’s hands in his. As Richie looked at him, his eyes flashing with a rainbow light, Will said, “It’s okay. We’ll use your power mimicry, kay? I can show you, it’s probably a lot like my color summoning.”

Richie slowly nodded, and Will continued, “Okay, just press your fingers together. Now, I try to suck the color from each hand, and it kinda overloads with energy and transforms quickly. Maybe try to absorb your own powers?”

Richie glanced down as he pressed his fingers together and Will and Nancy stepped back, making sure everyone gave him enough room should the transformation go wrong. And after a minute, Richie shut his eyes, some sort of glow coming from his hands.

And then with a flash, Richie had transformed.

He glanced down, seeing an outfit that kind-of reminded Will of Mike’s, but with some subtle differences- the boots were sharper, the gloves longer, the mask styled differently, and, most obviously, he had different colors- dark blue and gray.

Richie positively *beamed*, and after a second, he rushed over to

Nancy, saying, “Nance, do you *see* -”

Once he grabbed her hand, he gasped as the blue on his outfit suddenly shifted into red, the gray turning to orange. His grin only widened, as he said, “Nance, this is the *coolest fucking shit!* Are you seeing this?”

Nancy smiled and nodded. “Yep. Now, let’s go break your brother out of prison.”

“That,” Richie said, as the Losers rushed over to see his new costume, “Sounds like a great fucking plan.”

Joyce stopped the van right outside where the tunnel entrance should be, and as she glanced back at everyone, she said, “Are you all sure you want to do this?”

El gripped the arm of her chair as she glanced towards Kali and Will, who had been seated beside her. Will bit his lip, nodding but keeping his eyes shut. Kali also smiled a little, saying nervously, “Well, I get to take down the people who tormented me for years. What could be more fun than that?”

And El slowly stared down at her hands. She was really going back into the Lab. *Her* Lab. There were probably doctors she recognized in there, even if *he* wasn’t there... which, who was she kidding? He probably was. But she *had* to go back inside. To find Mike and get him *out*.

“Jane?” Kali asked, her voice dropping sympathetically.

El slowly sighed, pulling her hair out of her face as she glanced up, and she said, “Well, I’m ready as I’ll ever be.”

“Are you ready for this?”

Jonathan turned towards the rest of his group- Mike Hanlon had ended up volunteering, as he figured they should have at least one

Loser outside “in case of clown”, and he also could use his ice if the explosions got too hot. Everyone else had blatantly refused to stay outside, instead wanting to go in and find their friends, and Jonathan didn’t blame them.

Hanlon nodded. “Let’s do this thing.”

Jonathan reached into his bag, pulling out one of the homemade bombs, and aimed it at the electric fence up ahead.

“Let’s hope they’re already through the tunnels,” he said, and he threw the bomb.

30. El Hopper, the God of Destruction

CHAPTER THIRTY

El Hopper, the God of Destruction

The tunnels were dark, and damp, and very, very dirty.

“As if breaking into the Lab wasn’t stressful enough,” Kali muttered, ducking underneath *something* that was growing on the ceiling, “We’ve gotta wade through a city of bacteria in order to even start.”

“This should be it.” Joyce said, glancing up at the ceiling. “Yes, there’s a trapdoor here. Steve will stay to guard the entrance- anyone want to stay with him?”

After a pause, Nancy said, “Uh, M- Rich, why don’t you stay here?”

“I wanna find the others.” Richie said hesitantly.

“You’re still exhausted after the memory thing,” Nancy said carefully, kneeling down to get on his level, “And this place will probably make you feel worse.”

Richie paused, glancing towards Steve, before saying, “Okay, but if I hear screaming, we’re going out there.”

Nancy nodded and gave him a quick hug. “I’ll bring our brother back.” She said. “Then we’ll go home.”

Richie smiled slightly as she pulled away. “Home.”

Max turned to Nancy, saying, “Once I run you guys out, I’ll go back and check on him on occasion.”

“Do you have a weapon?” Hopper asked cautiously.

“Jonathan got me a cool dagger.”

“Might not be super useful against guns.” Hopper said.

“They are if you shove them in a leg from behind.” Max shrugged.
“Or just shove it in the side and run. Or-”

“I think you should stop talking about murder.” Hopper suggested.

“You’re the ones who brought it up.”

“Alright, just remember-” Bill said carefully. “We’re gonna g-g-get to the ninth floor, Max is gonna g-g-get us a keycard, and then we’re gonna f-f-find our f-friends as fast as possible-”

“Then I set the place on fire.” Nancy said. “Because, I mean, it worked the first time.”

“Then we take the ones with the most energy to go fight IT.” Bev said.

“If IT’s not here already.” Hanlon shrugged.

“Okay.” Joyce said. “Dustin, you’re up.”

Dustin moved over, standing as high as he could to touch the ceiling, before shutting his eyes. After a second, he pulled away, his eyes with a slightly golden tint.

“They’ll probably know it’s me,” he said quickly, as Max held out her hands for everyone to grab onto, “So we better hurry.”

“Let me go first,” Joyce said, before disappearing into thin air. The Losers gasped as the trapdoor pulled itself open, and they all heard some kind of a commotion at the top. After a minute, Joyce peered down, once again visible, and said, “Room’s clear.”

Bev turned to Will as the others started to climb up. “Your Mom is fucking awesome.”

Will beamed and nodded.

Max dropped them all off on the Ninth floor, and then dashed off with Lucas. After a second, they came back, and she tossed them all keycards, saying, “Took care of the guards in the halls. Now let’s try the doors.”

“Spread out.” Kali said, as everyone glanced to her. “Nobody goes alone. Jane, with me- Nancy, with Dustin, Bev and Bill, Lucas and Max, Will and Joyce. Hop, you can just go anywhere, really.”

Hopper opted to stick by his daughters, as Kali led them down a hall, splitting off from the others for a moment. As they turned, Kali said, “Alright, Hop, I went over this with the others while we were planning, but look for doors without windows- they don’t like us being able to see what’s going on outside, especially if there’s a disturbance. Complicated Locks are a bonus.”

“Mike!” El started calling, moving to the edge of a door as she waited for Kali to finish checking through whichever one she’d just opened. “Mike!”

“Jane, quiet down,” Kali said quickly, “We don’t want to give away our position.”

“They’ve gotta know something’s going on,” El shot back. “And if Mike’s in one of these rooms...”

What would happen? Would he even respond? The last time she’d seen him, he’d been so... so *blank*. She didn’t want to see him like that ever again, she didn’t know what she’d do if she found him and he didn’t even *look* at her...

“If he’s in one of these rooms,” Hop said, gently putting a hand on her shoulder, “We’ll find him. We’ll find him, don’t worry.”

Will and Joyce then turned the bend, and Kali said, “You two finish this hall. We’ll start on the next floor.”

“What if you run into guards?” Will asked.

“We’ll handle it.” Kali assured him, also shooting Joyce a quick smile, “Besides, we have to go as fast as we can. Dustin’s overloading of the cameras won’t last forever.”

“Send Max up first.” Joyce said.

Kali shook her head. “She can come up after us, and we don’t want to overload her. We’ll be back soon; Jane, Hop, let’s go.”

El nodded, leading the way up the staircase. No alarms were going off yet; Dustin’s knockout must have worked, and the doctors must not have wanted to alarm anybody quite yet that there was a problem. That was good, it meant that a lot of the patrolling staff would have no idea that they were coming.

As they rushed up the stairs, reaching the next floor and rushing out, Kali said, “Alright, Jane, I need you to start at the other end of the hall- blast anyone who comes around the corner. Hop, go with her so she doesn’t get herself shot. I’ll start from down here, send Max your way once she-”

She was cut off by a loud, pounding scream.

A scream that El instantly recognized.

No. No, no, no, no, NO!

“*Mike!*”

El burst away before anyone else could move, following the noise as fast as she could, using her powers to push herself forwards faster even as Kali and Hopper called for her. Mike was *screaming*, Mike was being hurt, and she could get him *out*.

She had already found the door, rushing to unlock it, as Kali and Hopper caught up. “Just wait a moment-” Kali said.

In response, El kicked the door open and rushed in, hands out. She slid to a stop, however, in the middle of the room, upon realizing that it was empty.

No, no, she’d heard him behind the door, she’d definitely heard him, she had to have heard him...

“El!” Hopper had run in after her, and she slowly turned towards him as he said, “El, be careful!”

“Wh-where is he?”

“Honey, he-”

“I heard him! I heard him, you heard him...”

“Jane!” Kali rushed in, stopping dead when she saw the empty room. “What is going-” She suddenly froze, eyes wide. “Jane, Hop, we have to get out of here.”

“What? What’s going on?” Hopper asked.

El, though, found her eyes drawn towards the corner, where a security camera rested. That shouldn’t bother her, she knew that Dustin had those knocked out for at least a few minutes... right?

Wait.

Wait, *fuck*.

The light underneath the lens was flashing green. The camera was *on*. How long had the cameras been on?

“Kal-“

At that moment, the door shut.

“*No!*” Kali screamed first, rushing to the door and failing to pull it open. “No, no, *no!*”

Hopper caught on quickly to what was happening, and immediately went for the door, too, trying to break it down. El, meanwhile, kept staring at the camera. Of *fucking course* the cameras would still be on, why would they expect the Lab to use the same cameras when they *knew* that Dustin could knock them out?

Hopper was still pounding on the door, as Kali moved back, running her hands through her hair and muttering curses to herself. El stepped a bit closer to the door, wondering why exactly she was starting to feel kind of dizzy, why she kind of wanted to *sleep* ...

As Hopper stepped back, about to hit the door, they heard a *click*,

which El recognized as the door unlocking sound. And then they heard a much more disturbing sound.

They heard Max let out a screech.

They were still for an instant, still trying to process what was going on. Then El narrowed her eyes and let her feet carry her forwards, rushing ahead and flinging the door open.

Outside, Max was kicking at a soldier, who'd grabbed her from behind. A few feet away, Lucas was trying to fight off two more, screaming at the one behind him, panic in his expression as he saw Max's distress.

El took one look at the struggle, hate and *anger* building up in her chest, and then she waved her hand, and the soldier holding Max screeched and dropped to the ground, releasing her. Max stopped, staring at El in an almost fearful way. El, meanwhile, looked back to Lucas as Kali and Hopper rushed out, and with a few more waves of her hands, the guards he was fighting also fell.

There was a deafening silence, before the alarms began blaring.

"El..." Max began, but El just shook her head and started down the hall. She bent over one of the soldiers, grabbing a key from him, and she said, "Keep looking here, destroy any files on us you can find. I'm going to find the others."

"You... you can't go alone..." Kali started.

El gave her a dark look, and then said to everyone, "Don't go in any rooms if you don't have a way out. I'll be upstairs"

And then she turned and ran, ignoring their shouts behind her.

She ran into some soldiers several halls down, as she was looking for the stairs. But she didn't panic, even as they drew their guns. She wasn't scared of them anymore, she didn't have *time* to be scared. And she was *done* letting them scare her.

So she rushed into the fray, throwing her arms out to knock men back and to shield herself. She managed to get close enough to he

group that she allowed herself to stop for a moment, and then she spun, letting her powers take care of everything; as she moved in a circle, her hair flying around her, her eyes shut tight, she could hear shouts and crashes as her powers burst out, knocking men against the wall and causing weapons to clatter to the floor.

As she opened her eyes again, she raised her arms, watching as all the guns flew into the air. Then, with a clech of her fist, they all crushed in on themselves and clattered again to the floor.

And then it was time to take care of the Guards again. Didn't take too long; all she had to do was keep throwing them against the wall, keep her eyes pealed across the halls just in case reinforcements should arrive, keep letting her fury channel her energy into making these soldiers *hurt*, making them leave her *alone*.

After a minute, most of the soldiers were out. El paused for a moment, breathig slowly and brushing a strand of hair out of her face. Slowly, she approached one man, feebly stirring on the ground. She knelt in front of him, scanning his face; she thought she recognized him, thought she remembered his face from her own time in this hellhole, remembered him standing by as she screamed and cried, maybe even shoving her into a wall once or twice for being too slow to obey. And as he looked at her, a deep fear in his eyes, El felt her fury rise even higher, felt a fire behind her eyes. She wondered if he knew who she was; she was transformed, sure, but her powers weren't common as far as she was aware. But even if he didn't know, it didn't matter. What mattered was that *he* was he one who was afraid now.

"I am going to ask this *once*." El said, letting her anger leak into her voice, letting him know exactly how *little* patience she had for whatever bullshit he might try to give her.

"My friends. Where are they?"

The second the alarms went off, Mike knew what was happening.

He knew they were coming, but he also knew how easy it would be

to trap them. It was all his fault, all because of him, but he couldn't think about that now.

What he could think about was that his brother had been *here*, and he'd gotten out.

The last time he'd remembered his brother, he hadn't even been ten years old, and he'd been lost for *days*, and Mike and Nancy had alternated between crying and searching for him whenever they could. And then he'd shown up, crying and hurt and saying he had to go, and then Mike had forgotten him completely.

Now his memory returned, he could figure out pretty damn quickly what had happened. His brother could wipe memories, and the Lab had made him wipe himself from everyone. And Mike also had no doubt that this boy the Losers said looked exactly like him, this "Richie"... well, it probably wasn't a coincidence that he was nearby and identical to him.

He'd probably taken the name from one of the games they used to play together, one of the stories they made up. Or maybe it was from that book Mike liked as a kid. Whatever, it didn't matter, what mattered was that he'd also escaped, and that Mike *couldn't* let him, or El, or anyone else, get trapped here, too.

Turning his back to the camera, Mike moved fast; he ripped off a strip of fabric from the bottom of his hospital gown, using the edge of one of the puzzle pieces to start the tear. Then he picked up the wolf, smiling now as he flipped it over in his hands. God, he'd forgotten this, too. Slowly, he tied the strip of fabric around his waist, placing the wolf inside so that it stuck. He wasn't planning on leaving this here when the guards came for him.

And in a second, the door burst open, and two guards rushed in. They didn't bother to notice Mike's torn outfit or makeshift belt, simply grabbing him and moving into the hall. Mike followed for a second, as one of them said, "Alright, kid. We've got a van outside. You're coming with us."

And then, Mike said, "No."

The Guards stopped in place, which was exactly what Mike wanted; as they turned to glare at him, frustrated that he was showing signs of a fight, they still didn't notice him start to bend over.

"What did you say?"

Mike then moved as fast as he could. As he curled in on himself, hoping to God they didn't move fast enough to stop him, he screamed, "No!"

And then he burst out, kicking out with his legs, and his forcefield knocked the guards away from him.

Mike stumbled around, seeing them slowly get up, and then he threw out his hands and let his strands take care of them. As soon as they were satisfactorily knocked out, Mike turned around. He'd seen Eddie and Ben dragged to the left, so that's where he headed first.

He was going to do it. He was going to get *out*.

31. Birds of a Feather Fight Together

Notes for the Chapter:

So unfortunately over vacation I feel behind on how many chapters I had pre-written, so I can't let you know how many chapters there are, but I'd assume we'll have about 36-40 at most. We should be done soon.

Once I'm done with this, I'm not sure what I'll do. Maybe I'll fic one of those IT/ST/ASOUE crossover gifsets I made a while back, though I'm not sure which one... probably the IT/ASOUE, since I might want to wait for S3 to write the ST in ASOUE one (in case I wanna use Robin and Erica), the IT in ST would require me to re-write S1 a third time in a row, and the ST in IT would take a WHILE to plan out. Also the ASOUE in ST one would also take a long time, though ASOUE in IT might be a good contender...

Also this was probably my favorite chapter to write for this fic so far. I'm really excited for y'all to read it! :D :D :D

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Birds of a Feather fight Together

Mike Hanlon glanced down the hill, and said, “Uh, Jonathan, we’ve got company.”

Jonathan followed his gaze and let out a low curse under his breath.

They’d been the distraction for quite some time, chucking bombs at the fence and then running, hoping to God that it was enough. The guards had indeed run out to check the commotion several times, but

now they had gotten a bit too close.

"How many bombs do we have left?" Mike asked, as Jonathan glanced into his bag.

"A few, but that might hit us if we use it on them." Jonathan said. He then turned to Mike, saying, "Uh, how good are you at combat?"

"I'm alright."

"Well, get ready." Jonathan said, pulling something else out of his bag; a polaroid photo. But as Mike watched, the photo started to glow, and then in a flash, it was a crossbow.

"I've got another photo for the arrows." Jonathan informed him quickly, digging into the bag and searching through pictures. "Mind holding them off for a second?"

"Got it."

Mike rushed forwards, catching sight of the soldiers heading their way. He shut his eyes, letting a cold breeze shoot past him, almost as a warning shot. Wow, the Party hadn't been kidding; it really *was* easier to use his powers while transformed.

One of the soldiers glanced his way, and then Mike shot out a blast of icicles, piercing into armor and then exploding into hundreds of ice shards. It was a trick that Mike had thought up himself, and it certainly worked; in the confusion and panic between the soldiers that followed, Mike was able to move to a new spot and send out another blast, this time of snow, almost as if he was sending a mini-blizzard. That effectively knocked out their vision for long enough for Jonathan to move up behind him, leap into a tree and settle on the branch, and load the crossbow. Mike stood back a second as Jonathan started sending arrows into feet and legs, and then he stomped on the ground, covering several feet of the ground in ice. Mike started focusing on sending spikes of ice up, blocking the soldiers' way back, and sending more snow to disorient them. He was so focused on this that he didn't notice someone was behind him until he heard Jonathan yell.

“Mike!” Jonathan shouted, and Mike whipped around, seeing more guards rushing in from the other side. Mike backed up, throwing up a hand to summon an ice shield as they pointed their guns, preparing to fire.

And then he froze, stunned, as an eagle screeched from above, and dive-bombed one of the soldiers, clawing at his face.

That Eagle.

Mike definitely recognized the bird. He’d seen him enough times, just not fighting like *this*.

The soldiers whipped around, staring in confusion, which gave Mike enough time to recover his own shock and start sending snow and hail into the faces of the men who were still there. Jonathan started firing, too, and the Eagle didn’t stop at just one soldier; once Mike and Jonathan became targets again, he started screeching more and hooking its talons onto necks, pulling them backwards.

After a moment, Mike allowed himself a small smile, letting a bit of relief wash over him as the fight started to die down.

As soon as all the soldiers were down, the Eagle flew into the center of the clearing, starting to grow larger as Jonathan jumped down from the tree, hesitantly raising his bow, just in case.

And Mike beamed as the eagle shifted into Stan Uris, who landed on the ground. His wings still remained, bursting from his back and spreading out, taking up as much room as they could.

And Mike just felt complete and utter *relief*.

Of course, some things worried Mike, like the dirty hospital gown his friend was wearing now, as well as the scratches and bruises across his arms and face. And, of course, the now fresh scar across his palm that Mike could see wasn’t helping his nerves. But that didn’t matter. Because he was *free* .

“Stan!”

Stan paused, staring at Mike with confusion. It took Mike a second to

remember why, even as Jonathan said, “You transformed. He won’t recognize you.”

“Shit, shit, sorry.” Mike said, moving forwards, a little hurt when Stan stepped backwards. “Stan, it’s me. It’s Mike.”

“What the... *Mike*?” Recognition suddenly flickered across Stan’s eyes, and he dropped his guard. “Shit, it must be really dark, I... are you *really* here?”

Mike smiled, moving forwards again. “Yes! Yes, and you’re *out* ! You got out! Where are Eddie and Ben?”

In response, Stan glanced towards the Lab.

“Oh...”

“I’m going back in.” Stan said quickly. “I didn’t want to-“

“I know, I know you wouldn’t-”

“I was trying to find you, when I saw explosions this way. Where are the others?”

“They went in.”

“Of course they- who is *this* ?”

Mike glanced over. “Jonathan Byers. From Hawkins. We called in reinforcements.”

“Reinforcements?”

“Other powered people. Their friend is in there-”

“Mike Wheeler?”

“You saw him?”

“He looks like Richie.”

“They’re twins.”

“What?”

“Yeah. Richie’s a runaway.”

“I’m actually not surprised...” Stan trailed off. “Actually, I... *Mike*, the Lab fucked up, they overloaded Ben’s energy, they... *IT*...”

Mike nodded, showing him his own palm, the scar still fresh. “We know. We know, we’re going after him as soon as we get the others out.”

Stan froze, looking panicked for a second. “Mike... Mike are you *sure*...”

“I...” Mike seemed to take notice of Stan’s fear. “Stan, are you...” Then Mike said. “It... it doesn’t matter right now. I’m glad you’re safe.”

Stan paused, and then smiled, and Mike moved forwards and hugged him. It was hard to hug his friend, as he had to maneuver his arms around the wings, but Stan hugged him back, and he said, “Why don’t... why don’t we get our friends, and get them somewhere safe?”

Mike glanced towards Jonathan, who was looking very awkward. “Uh, think we could... go inside?”

“We can try.” Jonathan said. “We’ll need an entryway-”

“No problem.” Stan said, stepping back and flapping his wings. “Think I could hold you both. Grab on.”

Mike found Eddie and Ben quite easily, mostly because Eddie was still being very, very loud.

“You *fuckers* ! What the *fuck* did you do now? No! We’re not going anywhere with you! Leave us the *fuck* alone!”

Mike turned the bend, seeing guards dragging the two boys away; Ben looked a lot more panicked than Eddie, who still looked furious. Mike, meanwhile, held out his hands, shutting his eyes as his light

beams shot out, striking the guards and surprising them from behind. Once they released the boys in their shock, Mike opened his eyes again and knocked them into the walls, waiting until he was sure they weren't moving before glancing back at the other boys.

Eddie and Ben were staring at him, completely shocked. Mike stared back, and then said, "Come on. Let's go."

Ben moved first, running forwards and stopping just short of Mike, scanning him. "Are you okay? What did they do to you?"

"We have to go ." Mike said, scaring himself a little with how hoarse his voice sounded. "Our friends are here, they could catch them if we don't move."

" *Fuck !*" Eddie yelled, finally moving to rush over. "They're here? Richie? Bill? Mike and Bev?"

"I don't... I don't *know.*" Mike admitted. "But... someone's here. That's the alarms."

Ben and Eddie glanced to each other, and then Eddie said, "Well, then, let's move the fuck out."

They headed for the staircase, which Ben seemed to be able to find easily. They rushed to the next floor, where Ben and Eddie rushed out first. Eddie stood in front of the other boys, throwing out his arms whenever they thought they heard footsteps. Mike wanted to tell him to stop, remind him that he had a perfectly good forcefield that he could use whenever he liked, but he... well, he didn't want to talk much. He was still very shaken, still could feel himself flinch back whenever anything too sudden was sounded, still just wanted to shut his eyes and *hide* somewhere... but he could do that later. He could do that when the others were out. He just had to make it through *now* . He had to get out *now* .

"What about Stan?" Ben asked, as they rushed around a bend, backing up as they thought they heard someone coming.

"We'll find him. He'll find us." Eddie said. "And we'll find the others,

and we'll... we'll take care of *this* -" he waved his palm, which made Ben flinch, "And everything'll be okay..."

Ben and Eddie picked up their pace, turning the bend upon hearing what sounded like shouts. Mike, however, paused at the end of the hall. A door slammed open in the other hall, and he heard shouting. His first instinct was to *run*, to get as far away as he possibly could, but he found that all he could do was freeze in place, the sounds filtering into his ears and filling his head, filling his brain, with yelling and cursing and *screaming* ...

And then he heard *her* voice.

And the breath was completely knocked out of him.

"Stay back!"

She's here, she's here, she's here, she's here, she's here!

The second he could move again, he moved back down the hall, even as he heard Ben and Eddie call for him from another hall, realizing that he'd been left behind. But Mike moved faster than them, almost flying, moving faster than he had since he'd ended up in this circle of hell. He slid to a stop at the end of the hall, turning and staring and feeling a weight he didn't even know was there lift off of his chest.

She's here!

El was there, and she was right in front of him.

She didn't spot him, though; her back was to him, as she waved her arms, throwing guards who'd probably been pursuing her around like ragdolls. But he knew it was her; he recognized her hair, recognized her costume, the way she stood, the way she moved, and most of all, he'd recognized her voice.

He didn't have to see her face to know it was her. But, God, he wanted to see her face.

But he couldn't bring himself to call out to her, couldn't form the words, his fear still slowly ebbing away, his shock still slowly wearing off. And she'd finished with the guards, and she started

walking, walking away from him, walking off to go find him or find more Lab workers to fight. He didn't know, but he knew he *had* to get to her.

He stumbled forwards a little, but his legs felt like lead; they'd felt bad all day, but his waves of fear and the sensory overload of the alarms were making his balance worse.

He stared after her, and opened his mouth, struggling for a minute, before finally letting out a single word- it was barely above a whisper, but as hopeful as it was happy.

“El.”

And, thank God, she heard him.

El whipped around faster than he thought possible, her hair flying behind her, and then he could see her, and she saw him. Her eyes widened in surprise, and for a moment, they were standing still, staring at each other, their eyes locking before scanning each other, taking in that yes, they were there. She flinched slightly upon seeing the cuts and bruises, looked sad on seeing his ripped hospital gown, looked relieved upon seeing that he was *alive*. Mike wasn't sure what emotions he was expressing on his own face, but he was hoping it was good. Because he didn't want her to think he didn't want to see her, even if he knew it was too dangerous for her here. He'd wanted to see her, he'd *needed* to see her. And now she was right in front of him.

“Mike.” she gasped.

And then she ran towards him, flying across the hall. Mike only managed to stumble forwards a little before she was there, and she threw her arms around him, hugging him as closely as she could, saying, “Oh, God, Mike! Mike, I’m sorry, I’m so, so sorry!”

At first, Mike couldn’t even move enough to hug her back. He was shocked at the hug, shocked to find that she was touching him, she was there and she was hugging him and she had *come for him*.

And for just a few moments, Mike forgot they were still in the Lab.

He forgot there were still soldiers and guards and Brenner and sleeping gas and locked rooms. He forgot there was a *world* outside. For a few moments, Mike felt *safe*. He hadn't felt safe since he'd walked into that building to fight Nancy. He hadn't felt safe in forever. But he was safe now. Because El was here. El was *here* and they were *together*.

And then Mike started sobbing.

He stopped functioning for a minute, and all he could do was reach up his arms to hug her back, to hug her to him, his entire mind screaming to *not let her go, do NOT let her go, don't leave her*. He hugged her close to him, and then he started crying, and then he couldn't *stop*. He couldn't stop, and he was openly sobbing, and he moved to bury his head in her shoulder, shaking and weeping as they embraced, not entirely sure he would be able to stay on his feet, not entirely sure he wouldn't just collapse and keep crying.

She stiffened slightly at first, surprised, but then she was hugging him tighter, too, and El said, "I'm sorry, Mike. It's okay. It's okay, I'm here. I'm here. I'm *here*."

She was. She was here.

Mike still couldn't stop crying, still couldn't let go of her as they hugged.

But he knew, somewhere inside, that he'd be alright.

Because they were *together*.

32. Oh, Yeah, We have some Problems

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Oh, Yeah, We have some Problems

“Mike!”

El moved her head slightly, looking down the hall. The world had been a blur for the past minute; she’d been fighting guards, knocking them around, her mind focused completely on *finding Mike*... and then she’d heard him, and she’d turned around, and he’d been *there*, and he’d been hurt, so obviously hurt, but he’d been *there*, and he was staring at her, and he was alive and he saw her and she could only run to him and embrace him, and then, before she knew what was happening, he was *crumpling* in her arms, weeping and shaking, and he *wouldn’t* let her go. Not that she’d let him go anytime soon, either.

But now, as El turned, she saw two new boys, staring in bewilderment and hesitation. She moved slightly away from Mike, who instantly moved, too, still refusing to let her go.

“Mike, Mike, just give me a minute-” Mike still gripped her, his head still buried in her shoulder. Finally, El managed to calm him down enough to pull away slightly; he still was crying into her shoulder, and still gripping onto her chest, but she was able to move and see the boys better. She finally recognized them, remembering the missing posters and photo that Bev had shown her.

“Ben. Eddie.” she said, and the boys jumped.

“Who are you?” Ben asked.

“Jane Hopper.” she introduced, moving her arm to grip harder onto Mike. “You can call me El.”

Eddie suddenly blinked, stepping back. “ You’re El? Mike’s El?”

El paused. “Uh... I guess?”

“How... how do you know us?” Ben asked hesitantly, moving to grab onto Eddie’s arm.

“Your... your friends are here.” El said. “They came with me-”

“Our *friends*-” Eddie asked, panicked.

At that, they heard another door slam open, another crash from several halls down. El instantly moved Mike again, pushing him behind her and holding out her hands. Eddie moved over quickly, standing besides her and Mike, as if preparing to shield them himself; Ben rushed up beside him, and they all stared ahead.

And then they heard Bev’s voice. “*El!* Are you up here?”

Ben gasped instantly, calling out, “*Bev?*”

There was a pause, so long that El was starting to wonder if something had happened, and then Bev and Bill burst into the hall, eyes wide. Ben and Eddie stared at them, confused for an instant, a little blank at the transformation magic. Then Bev said, “Boys, it’s us! It’s us, Bev and Bill, we’re here!”

Almost instantly, Ben and Eddie rushed towards them, running up and embracing their friends, moving past El and Mike at the speed of light.

“Ben!” Bev cheered, her eyes brightening. “Ben! Eddie!”

“E-Eds! Ben!” Bill said.

As Eddie pulled away from the hug, smiling for the first time in forever, he said, “For fuck’s sake, Bill, like I keep tellin’ you and Richie, stop calling me that.”

“Are you okay?” Bev asked, pulling slightly away from Ben and checking him over, her face falling everytime she spotted a bruise or scar. “Oh, God, what did they do to my boys?”

“I’m alright, I’m alright.” Ben said, non-convincingly. “Eddie got the

worst of it, you just can't see cause, you know, invincible.”

Bev and Bill both looked to Eddie, who glanced to the ground and said, “I’m fine. They just didn’t like me cause I told them to go fuck themselves every thirty seconds.”

“Well, that’s our Eddie.” Bev said softly, though she looked very nervous.

“Wh-where’s Stan?” Bill asked.

“He hasn’t found you yet?” Eddie asked, eye widening.

“He got o-out?”

“Fuck, oh, fuck.” Eddie muttered.

“He got out, we think.” Ben said. “The Guards certainly weren’t too happy, so I definitely think he made it out. He might still be in the woods-”

“So he’s alone?” Bev asked, panicked. “With IT out there?”

“You know about that?” Ben asked guiltily.

“Our sc-scars burst open, dipshit.” Bill said, waving his hand around.

“It wasn’t Ben’s fault.” Eddie said quickly. “The Lab overloaded his powers-”

“That makes sense.” Bev said quietly. “IT woke up early because of an energy overload-”

“And it wasn’t Ben’s fault.”

“We’re not b-b-blaming B-Ben.”

“Good, because we’d have to fight you, and that would put a damper on our escape.”

“Probably would.”

Then Bev caught a glance of the boy behind Bev, and she stopped for

a second, staring. “Holy shit, is this Mike?”

El turned slightly, to see that Mike still looked like a wreck; his eyes were red, tears were still streaming down his face, and he was staring ahead in bewilderment and slight hesitation, his fingers twitching as if he was preparing to summon a forcefield, in case Bev and Bill turned out to be threats. El slowly moved her hand, slipping her fingers into his, as she nodded.

“Yeah, he looks a lot like Richie, doesn’t he?” Ben asked.

“Well, they’re tw-twins.” Bill said.

“What?” Ben blinked in confusion.

“Secret twins.” Bev added.

“Where is Richie?” Eddie asked.

“Waiting for us. And M-M-Mike’s outside as a di-distraction.”

“Speaking of which,” El said, drawing everyone’s attention, “Let’s get them out of here, and then work on destroying this place.”

“Good pl-plan.” Bill said, and then he and Bev started down the hall, calling for Max.

El turned to Mike. “Are you okay? Can you run?”

Mike nodded, and then he glanced at her and nodded, he said quickly, “El, I love you.”

El smiled back at him as they started to run. “I love you, too.”

“We got them! Get us out of here!” Bev yelled, bursting out of the stairwell and calling down the hall.

El paused just outside the door, staring ahead. At the end of the hall, Lucas had an energy shield up, blocking some kind of bullets, while Max stood behind him, holding a knife and saying, “Come on, let me

stab *one* .” Hopper and Kali were there, too, with the latter holding a gun towards the weakening shield, and El instantly felt a little bad about running off on them earlier. They turned around, though, relieved upon seeing Mike.

“Thank *fuck!*” Kali said, lowering her gun slightly, as Hopper rushed over to check over the kids.

“*Mike!*” Lucas and Max both cheered; Lucas looked like he wanted to run over, but he was a bit preoccupied making sure that nobody got shot. Max rushed over, though, throwing her arms around her friend and beaming. Mike flinched for an instant, but smiled and hugged her, too.

“Where’re the oth-others?” Bill asked.

“Will and Joyce are on the next floor down,” Kali said quickly, “And Nancy and Dustin should be with them, if they’re not on the way up.”

Mike suddenly perked up, looking over. “Nancy’s here?”

“Everyone’s here.” Hopper said, scanning Mike real quickly. “Are you alright?”

Mike hesitated. “Y-yeah.”

Hopper then turned to Ben and Eddie. “What about you two?”

“Uh, yes, sir.” Ben said.

“Who the fuck is this?” Eddie quickly said.

“Eds, be p-p-polite.” Bill said.

“This is my Dad.” El said carefully. “He’s gonna help.”

“Yeah, he’s a police officer.” Max said.

Eddie instantly flinched, going, “Uuuuuuh...”

“He’s not gonna send you back to your Mom,” Bev said quickly. “He’s probably gonna actually get us even farther away.”

“Speaking of getting away,” Kali said, finally pocketing her gun- *her outfit has pockets too?*- and looking over. “Lucas is going to drop the shield as I use my illusions on the guards over there. While they’re blacked out, Max is going to run some of you to the tunnels. The rest of us will fight our way out until she gets back.”

“I can’t run everyone at once, but I can take trips.” Max said quickly.
“I’ll take these kids and Mike first, and-”

“No!” Mike said, leaning forwards and grabbing onto El’s arm. “No, I want to stay with El!”

The others glanced at each other, and then Max said, “Uh, well I guess I could...”

All of the sudden, they heard some muted yells, and they all glanced to Lucas and Kali, who were the only ones close enough to the bend in the hall to see what’s going on. After staring for a second, Kali turned to them and said, “Well, Nancy’s here. And she set the hallway on fire.”

After a second, Lucas dropped the shield, and Dustin ran in first, scanning the crowd. Once he spotted Mike, he rushed over, hugging him. “You’re okay!” he said. After he pulled away, he turned to the other boys a bit awkwardly. “Uh, and so are you... uh...”

“I’m Ben, that’s Eddie.” Ben introduced, and Eddie backed up a little more, confused at just how *many* new people there were.

“Great!” Dustin said. “I’m Dustin, and we’re busting you out. Jonathan and the other Mike are waiting outside, Steve and Richie are in the tunnel, and... wait, weren’t there three of you?”

“Stan got out already.” Bev said. “We’ll go look for him once we’re out of here.”

“Okay,” Dustin said, “I think Nancy’s taken care of the guys in the hall-”

“I’ll get these boys to the tunnels and come back for the rest. You all go as fast as you can.” Max said, holding out her arms for Ben and Eddie to grab onto.

The two boys glanced hesitantly towards Bev and Bill, and Bill said, "D-d-don't worry. We can t-t-trust them."

"Oh, but also, you might vomit." Max said, as soon as Eddie and Ben gave in and confusedly grabbed onto her hands. "Just a head's up."

"What?" Eddie said, and then they were gone in a blur.

And as they passed the hall, Nancy turned the bend, tossing her short hair back over her shoulder as she said, "Alright, hallway's clear, Joyce and Will are downstairs, so we have to grab them, there's been no sign of-"

She stopped, staring ahead, her eyes meeting her brother. And she stopped, and stared for a minute, before saying, "Oh, God, Mike!"

Mike finally moved first, rushing forwards and hugging his sister. She started saying, "God, Mike, I'm so sorry! I'm sorry, I should've... are you okay?"

Then she glanced down, and saw what was tied to his waist. She pulled away, staring between him and the stuffed wolf, and then she said, "Do you... where did you find this?"

Mike hesitated. "Uh..."

Then, unfortunately, Max rushed next to them, saying, "We have a situation."

"Situation?" Hopper asked, as everyone looked a little worried.

Max bit her lip. "Yeah, uh, I left the boys just outside the tunnel, because, uh..."

"Spit it out." Lucas said cautiously.

"Richie and Steve aren't there."

There was silence for a second, before Nancy said, furiously, "They're what?"

Only a few minutes before, Richie had been chatting nonstop.

“And *then*, after we beat the shit outta it, we had to get *out* of the sewers, and *don’t* ask about *that* shit-”

“Okay, kid, I swear I *am* paying attention,” Steve said quickly, “But, uh, do you think they’re okay? They’ve been up there a long time.”

Richie glanced upwards towards the trapdoor, considering. “I could go see-”

“No, no, you’re staying with me, and we have to stay here in case they come by.”

“Steve, my *siblings* are up there.”

“And so’s my girlfriend, while my boyfriend plays with explosives outside.”

“God, I can’t believe that Nancy has *two* boyfriends.” Richie said, laughing. “What did Mom have to say about... about...” He trailed off, suddenly spotting something that paralyzed him.

“Rich? Hey, are you okay, bud?”

Richie didn’t answer, instead staring down the long tunnel, fear suddenly sparking in his eyes.

A paper was blowing in their direction, moving along the floor as if being blown by the wind. They stared for a second, with Richie looking significantly more scared than Steve, who was simply perplexed.

The paper landed at their feet, face-down, and Richie started to shake. “Steve, what does it say?”

“You could read-”

“I can’t. I can’t pick that up, I...”

Slowly, Steve bent over, picking up the paper and worriedly flipping it over. He paused, and then said, “I thought you didn’t have any

missing posters.”

That was exactly what Richie was afraid of.

“Steve, we have to run, *now*.”

“What?”

“Now!”

Richie grabbed Steve’s hand, not noticing as his eyes flashed blue-grey and his outfit changed colors accordingly, dragging him in the opposite direction of the paper, taking off at a run. They’d only managed a few steps when Richie saw a shadow on the other end of the tunnel, and he stopped dead in his tracks.

“What the *fuck*-” Steve began.

Richie was about to turn around, to look the other way, when the lights began. Out of the shadows, something opened up, and there were bright, beautiful lights.

If Bev hadn’t warned him about these, he might have been caught helpless.

Instead, Richie did the one thing he could think of.

Almost instinctively, he let himself slip away, let his eyes cloud, as he drifted into memory-manipulation mode, doing the only thing he could think to get away from the lights.

The *Deadlights*.

And then the strangest thing happened.

Suddenly, he was somewhere else.

33. Kali finally gets to use her Gun

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Kali finally gets to use her Gun

“They’re *what*? ”

Max flinched. “The tunnel was empty. I don’t know where they went, I can go look...”

“My boyfriend and my *brother* are missing?” Nancy asked, horrified.

“It’s okay, we’ll find them!” Max said. “I can run some more people down if you...”

Nancy considered. “Okay, okay... get Lucas, Dustin and the Losers down, I’ll take the rest to find Joyce and Will. Search the lower areas if you can, but if you get tired, don’t overwork yourself. See if you can get everyone to Jonathan and Mike.”

Max nodded, holding out her arms for everyone.

“Are you sure you’ll be okay?” Bev asked, hesitantly moving forwards.

“We’ll be fine. Just dark-energy-blast anyone who looks like a dick.” Nancy said, smiling nervously. “And don’t worry, we’ll find the others.”

“Wh-wh-what if I-IT...” Bill began.

“We’ll *find them*.” Nancy said quickly. “Don’t worry.”

The second Max sped off, Nancy turned to the others. “Alright, bitches, let’s find Joyce and Will, set this place on fire, and *get out*.”

“We might have to change part of the plan.” El said as they started to move, reaching to grab onto Mike’s hand. “They had some kind of

backup on the cameras, they can see where we are.”

“Fuck, that makes sense.” Nancy muttered as she kicked open the door to the stairwell. “Alright, Hop, you go in front with me. Kal, stay in the back with the kids, shoot anything that comes up behind us.”

Kali nodded, slipping behind El and Mike.

“The Byers should still be on the next floor down.” Nancy told Mike carefully. “But when Max meets up with us, I’ll send you and El down with her.”

Mike nodded a little, keeping his hand tightly gripping his girlfriend’s as they rushed down the stairs. When they finally reached the door, Nancy burst it open with a shot of flame and ran into the hall, before signaling for the others to come through. Everyone ran in, following her as she started to call. “Will! Joyce! Ms. Byers! Will!”

And they ran for a little bit, until they turned a bend, turned into the *wrong* bend, and Mike froze in place, fear suddenly paralyzing him.

“Mike?” El asked, whipping around. “What is it?”

“Mike?” Nancy stopped, too, and then they were all staring at him, and Mike really wished he could melt into the floor, but instead, he just found himself staring ahead and shaking his head. “Mike, are you okay?”

He slowly gestured to the doors ahead, doors he recognized. “I... I can’t go there.”

“What are you talking about?”

El turned, looking at the doors, and then her face fell. “Oh.” She said, and suddenly she didn’t want to take one step farther either.

“What’s going on?” Nancy asked, sounding worried.

Kali was the one who responded. “Um, that would be a... one of the testing rooms.”

“Oh, oh fuck...” Nancy muttered, as El and Mike both stepped back a

little.

Hopper glanced between everyone, before saying, “Okay, how about Kali, you take them in another direction, and Nancy and I’ll go this way?”

“Splitting up seems like a bad plan.” Kali said.

“If Joyce and Will are that way, we need to go, but you kids don’t need to come this way if you can’t...” he said.

El hesitated, before saying, “Stay safe.”

“Don’t get into any fights unless necessary.” Hopper said to the kids, “And if Max shows up, you go *with her*. Okay?”

They nodded, and then Nancy moved up closer, meeting her brother’s eyes. “Mike, if you need me, just yell, okay? I’ll find you. I’m not going to let them take you again. I *won’t*. Okay?”

Mike nodded. “I’ll... see you soon.”

Nancy gave him a quick hug, as Hopper gave El one, and then nodded to Kali, who didn’t like hugs much. And then Nancy and Hopper rushed off, and Kali moved in front of the other two, staring them down.

“Alright, we’re not splitting up any more after this.” she said. “We are in the most dangerous place imaginable, and I’m not going to sugarcoat it. So we’re sticking together, and we’re *not* getting trapped again.”

Mike and El both nodded, and Kali glanced back towards the doors, looking towards the room and narrowing her eyes. Then, hesitantly, she said, “That was the room where they strap wires to you, right?”

“Kali...” El said, as Mike stiffened beside her.

“I just... want to know.” Kali said softly. “I was, um...” She glanced towards Mike again. “I was in there for hours on end, just making every illusion they could think of. Passed out a few times. So, I... I don’t like it much, either.”

She snorted slightly at the understatement, and then El slowly looked towards Mike, biting her lip before saying, “They wanted me to move things. Crush things. Tried to... to make me... make me *hurt* a cat once. And when I didn’t...”

Mike squeezed her hand and shut his eyes, turning his head away slightly. It was a second before he said, “They wanted to electrocute my field. And... I didn’t want to... and they *shattered* the glass and—”

He gripped El’s hand harder, as both of the sisters flinched. Then, El said, “That’s fucked up.”

“We’re fucked up.” Mike replied, looking like he was about to cry again.

Kali put her hands on the teenagers’ shoulders, and then she said, “Come on. Let’s find the Byers, and then destroy this place. Maybe I can shoot some guys on the way out.”

They nodded and headed back, turning down the hall and looking for a fork they hadn’t taken yet.

It was only a few minutes before they heard a shout, and froze in place.

It was definitely Will shouting, very close to them.

“*Get away from her!*”

“*Shit!*” Kali yelled, as they took off towards him.

Mike felt his heart pound in his chest as they followed the direction he seemed to be in, his grip on El’s hand getting tighter and tighter. He wasn’t sure how much he’d be able to fight, how much he’d be able to take before just crumpling on the ground and trying to shut the world out. But Will was in trouble, Will was screaming, and he couldn’t let Will get hurt...

Kali burst open the door, whipped out her gun, and froze, staring ahead. Mike and El peered over her, and instantly froze, too.

The room was filled with men, men who had guns pointed at Will,

who was standing in the middle of the room with purple skin and arms extended, looking prepared to fight some more.

And standing in the middle of the men was *him* .

El instantly felt paralyzed, staring into the face of Brenner. All the fear and panic she felt whenever she'd thought of seeing him again increased tenfold, her legs felt weak, her head buzzed, and she just wanted to *run* . Next to her, Mike gasped and shrunk back, looking ready to flee.

Kali, meanwhile, rushed forwards, grabbing Will by the shoulder and forcing him behind her, staring the other men down with fury. "Get away from him!"

"Kali!" El yelled, panicked, as the guns pointed straight to her.

Mike suddenly moved, too, beginning to slip his hand from El's, but she simply grabbed it again, running forwards with him. He stopped right behind Kali, before throwing his hand out, sending a forcefield around all of them before the bullets came flying. He shut his eyes, straining under the impact, until the fire ended. Then there was a long period of silence, while Will turned to look at them, a faint fear flickering in his eyes, widening into panic when he saw Mike.

Kali slowly turned away from the teens, looking towards Brenner with a dark hate in her eyes. "Get the *fuck* away from us." she finally said, still fingering the gun in her hand though she couldn't fire it without the shield leaving them exposed.

"Will, where's your Mom?" El asked quietly. "What happened?"

Will hesitated, before stammering, "Uh, we were surrounded and I was fighting and Brenner came in and Mom punched him in the face-"

"She did *what?*" El looked horrified and impressed at the same time.

"-and they grabbed her but she flipped the guy and then vanished, they were gonna shoot me to draw her out when you showed up,

she's probably still here-”

“Stand down,” Brenner suddenly said, and El jumped, moving to grip onto Mike’s free hand as he started to shake.

“Fuck you.” Kali spat.

Brenner turned his eyes towards Mike, who immediately started shaking, the shield flickering slightly. “Stand down.”

Mike bit his lip and glanced to the ground, as El gripped onto him. She moved slightly in front of him, making eye-contact with *him*, with *Brenner*, with the man she’d dreaded seeing again for years on end.

And then El said, “Go away.”

“Eleven.” Brenner simply said. “I see you’ve returned to us, too.”

“Never.” El said, shaking her head and feeling her hair fly around her. “No. None of *us* -” she gestured to everyone trapped inside the forcefield- “Are ever coming back here.”

“We’re trying to help you. To learn about you.”

“You’re trying,” El said darkly, all of her anger channeling into her words, “To turn us into weapons. Experiments. You’re stripping our humanity away so you can do what you want to us. And we’re not falling for it.”

“Stand. Down.”

“Never.” El said. “Never.”

And then Kali added, “Never.”

Will spoke up behind her, “Piss off!”

And then Mike spoke, finally looking up at the waiting soldiers, the waiting doctors, joining El in staring the real monster in the face, before adding, “Fuck you.”

There was dead silence, as Brenner stared at them, before nodding to the soldiers. They pointed their guns at the shield, ready to fire, ready to try and bring down the shield with as much force as they could.

And then everything happened all at once.

The door swung open behind them again, and someone burst in; El didn't turn to look, but she thought she heard Nancy's shout and Max's screech, as a few guns started swiveling towards them, too.

And then, as the soldiers were about to all unload on the field, the window flew open, an invisible hand throwing it up after seeing something moving outside, and *someone* burst into the room.

Mike dropped the shield, shock suddenly overwhelming him, as everyone turned, staring in bewilderment as a teenager rushed in through the window, widespread eagle wings wrapping around what might be Jonathan and Mike Hanlon to shield them from the fall inside. As they crashed to the floor, attracting everyone's attention, Kali whipped towards Brenner, raising her gun.

And she met his eyes as she pulled the trigger.

The shot rang out in the room. Everyone turned to stare, and as they did, Hanlon jumped to his feet, holding out his hands and sending a barrage of ice towards the soldiers, knocking them away, encasing them, stabbing them with shards.

El dropped in front of Mike, lifting him with her powers and moving them into the corner, dodging snow and hail flying their way. As they ran, she saw Joyce appear out of thin air out of the corner of her eye, rushing towards Will and knocking him to the floor to keep him from getting hit by a flying icicle. She could also spot Bev, Bill, Eddie and Ben- why were *they* here? Didn't Max move them?- running in towards the boy with wings, who was standing behind Hanlon, and Max, Dustin and Lucas rushing to the corner, trying to keep away from the cold storm.

El didn't notice Nancy had run up beside her until she and Mike had already stopped in the corner, covering each others' necks to shield

from the blast of cold air. Nancy dropped in front of them, clenching her fists and letting fire blast inside her palms, providing them with heat, while Hopper ran into the center of the room and grabbed Kali, dragging her into a safer location as she dropped the gun to the floor, its clatter as it landed blocked by all the other sounds that were happening together.

The storm only lasted a minute, and once it was over, everyone was silent for a good, long while. As El, Nancy and Mike turned around, staring ahead, Bill suddenly rushed towards the bird-boy- Stan?- and Hanlon, throwing his arms around them. The other Losers rushed over, all piling onto each other. Joyce and Will rushed over to Jonathan, and Max, Lucas and Dustin ran towards El and Mike, all asking if they were okay and *what* had just happened? After a moment, Will left Jonathan and ran to join them.

El slowly turned towards Kali and Hopper, who were surveying the room; it was a mess of ice and hail and snow, with soldiers, unconscious or dead, littering the ground. As El and Mike stood up, watching, Kali stumbled forwards, staring at the one corpse that she'd taken care of, that Hanlon hadn't needed to kill for her.

He was *gone*.

To El's shock, Kali let out a choked sob, sounding both relieved and scared. El glanced towards Mike, who moved to hug Lucas, and then she rushed out, throwing her arms around her sister. Hopper rushed over, too, as Kali started whispering to herself, "He's gone, he's gone..."

It was a minute before she heard Will ask, "What are you all doing here? I thought you were going somewhere else."

El and Kali glanced towards Nancy as she said, "Um... about that... it's not good news."

"Where's Richie?" came a new voice- oh, that was Stan's. Hanlon also looked confused, while the other Losers flinched and glanced towards Max, a pure panic in their eyes.

"And where's Steve?" Jonathan asked, realizing that his boyfriend

wasn't there.

"Um..." Max said. "You see, I tried to take them all to the tunnels to get them out, a-and... it was blocked, so we found Nancy and Hopper and heard Will yelling and came—"

"Max..." Hanlon said carefully, before turning to the other Losers, "Guys... what was blocking it?"

They all flinched, and El suddenly realized, with a chill colder than the winds Hanlon had summoned, that the fight wasn't over yet.

Bev whispered something first, whispered the answer so low that nobody could hear.

"What was that?" Joyce asked carefully.

Bev looked up at her, tears in her eyes, as she said loudly, "Balloons."

There was a dead silence. Then, Bill looked between Joyce and Hopper, and said, "Can you take us to the s-s-sewers?"

34. Everyone Gets to Fight a Clown

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Everyone Gets to Fight a Clown

Stars.

Richie saw Stars.

He thought he saw something else, too; a shadow, or something.

When he'd fallen into his memory-state, he'd seen things. Seen parts of IT's memories. Things he hadn't wanted to see, with feelings he didn't want to feel. But he didn't even think to re-write the memories of the monster- possibly because he couldn't, possibly because the Deadlights were starting to kick in.

And then he saw stars. And he could hear a voice in his head.

"So, you've come to play with the clown?"

Where are we?

"Wouldn't you like to know?"

Listen, bitch , that's why I asked.

"Don't be rude."

Don't eat children.

"You put on a brave face, one most people wouldn't see past. But I can see it. You're scared. You have so much fear."

Yes, I do. But I won't give into it. And I know something you don't.

"And what is that?"

I know what it's like to have friends. To have a family. To have someone

to protect.

“*Weakness.*”

Maybe for you. Oh, and I think I know something else, too.

I know how to kill you.

They'd seen it by accident, pretty soon after the Summer.

Bev had told them that, when she was in the Deadlights, she'd seen them fighting IT, when they were older. She was losing her memory of it, but she just remembered the fear. And during the short amount of time she was gone, Ben and Mike had researched the clown, finding what they thought might be a way to re-create her hallucination.

Which ended up being a lot of smoke inhalation.

They'd called Bev, and she'd been pissed that they'd done it without her, but at the time, she was in Oregon, and couldn't exactly get permission to breathe in smoke until she started seeing aliens, so the boys went into the underground clubhouse and started a small fire. They left slowly as they started taking in too much, one at a time, and the last two were Mike and Richie, and they'd seen things.

“We have to hook onto its... its *mind.*” Mike had said, once Bill had dragged them out and ranted about what a *stupid* plan it had been. “And fight it with our imagination.”

“Or we could beat it with a baseball bat.” Eddie had suggested. “That seemed to work before, and besides, we probably almost killed ourselves just on the off-chance that this would work.”

Richie and Mike had glanced at each other, though, convinced that they'd actually seen what they needed. That their vision of staring down the darkness, staring down the stars, was the right way to kill the clown, once and for all.

And, Thank God, they were right.

On the way out of the Lab, Jonathan planted more explosives, and Nancy set fire to multiple rooms of records. Mike watched it all burn with a keen interest, while El really just wanted to get *out* and find Richie and Steve.

"We're stealing their vans outside the fence and taking them to the sewer entrance, since the tunnels are blocked." Hopper explained as Nancy finished setting fire to a hall, sending them down the stairs. "Just jump into whatever car isn't full, we don't have time to organize. We've gotta get to this thing's nest, kill it, and get Steve and Richie out of there." He glanced behind him, looking at everyone. "Is everybody here and alright?"

They nodded, scanning the crowd to make sure nobody was actually left behind. Mike still gripped onto El's hand as if there was no tomorrow, something El didn't mind much.

The rest of the way out of the Lab, they didn't run into any more workers, which was good, because El wasn't sure she'd have the energy to fight them right now. The second they were out the door, leaping over the remains of the electric fence (taken care of by the explosives), Nancy shot a blast of fire back at the building, watching as it went up in flames.

El turned around, too, the fire reflected in her eyes as she watched. It was strange, seeing a place so similar to the one she'd been tortured in for her entire childhood just go up in smoke. She didn't know if what she was feeling was relief, sadness, happiness, or some combination, but at the moment, it didn't matter.

She and Mike jumped in a van, joined by a shaken Kali and Will, the latter of whom leapt at Mike to check him over, having been too distracted to do so before. Joyce hopped in the drivers' seat, working on starting the car- how did Joyce know how to steal a car?- as she said, "Everyone stay seated, we're going *fast* ." And while Jonathan jumped in the shotgun, El turned to her sister, and they stared at each other as the van took off.

"He's gone." El finally said, into the silence.

Kali nodded.

After another long period of silence, in which Mike leaned into El's shoulder and Will scooted closer to Kali, El said, almost blankly, "He's not going to hurt us again. He can't. He's gone."

Kali nodded again, and then she said, "And now he gets to burn with the rest of it."

They were quiet for another long time, as El and Mike both stared out the window, watching the other vans drive into the street. Above the cars, Stan was flying, glancing around on occasion, but mostly just trying to keep pace with the road.

After about a minute, Joyce shouted, "Wait a minute, you guys need seatbelts! For fuck's sake, we're going as fast as possible, you all need to be strapped in!"

They all paused, and then Will said, "Really, Mom, is that what we're worried about right now?"

"Yes!"

They abandoned the vans a few miles down, because they had to trek through some of the woods to get to the sewer entrance. El was glad they had the Losers with them, as they seemed to know the path pretty well.

They finally reached the entrance, standing just outside the river and staring ahead. It was big, and dark, and El felt a dark chill rip through her as she stared at it. After a second, Bill turned to the Party and said, "You d-d-don't have to come. This is o-our fight."

"Fuck that." Nancy said. "My boyfriend and my brother are down there."

"Yeah, that's our Steve!" Dustin said. "If that clown thinks he can mess with us-"

"But we would like to say," Bev interrupted hurriedly, "If... if anyone

wants to stay, we understand. This thing is a *nightmare*.”

After another beat, Hanlon turned to the boys dressed in hospital gowns and said, “I think... I think you guys should stay.”

“*Fuck no!*” Eddie and Ben both screamed.

“We literally j-just pu-pulled you out of several weeks stra-straight of torture.” Bill said. “You might not b-b-be...”

“If you think,” Eddie said, “I’m not going to be down there when we finally kill this motherfucker, so I can spit on his corpse, you all are *dead fucking wrong*.”

They all glanced to Stan, who looked very, very scared, and had his wings wrapped around him. “Stan?”

Stan paused, glancing at the ground, and then he said, “If I’m with you, I’ll be okay.”

“We’ll protect you, Stannie.” Bev smiled.

“Yeah.” Stan nodded. “And I’m not letting the clown take our trashmouth. We need him.”

And then the Losers glanced to Mike, and the Party followed their gaze, and Mike shriveled a little at the attention. “You can stay if you want.” El said carefully, squeezing his hand.

Mike paused, and then shook his head.

“Mike, really, you can stay-” Nancy began.

“No.” Mike said stiffly. “That’s my brother.” Everyone jumped as he admitted that, admitted that he *knew*, when they were pretty sure nobody had caught him up to speed. “I’m going in for him.”

There was another pause, and then Joyce said, “Well, alright. Let’s go kill a clown.”

Before they went in, Mike untied the stuffed animal, leaving the ripped strip of fabric on the ground. He placed the wolf on a rock,

watching it as he walked away. He didn't want to lose that. Not now.

The sewers were long, dark, and boring, but Mike felt like complaining about that might be a bit... inappropriate.

They traveled in silence for almost ten minutes, with Stan wrapping his wings around Eddie and Ben, who were shivering in the cold; Nancy kept a dancing flame in her palm besides Mike to keep him from dying of chills before they could even reach the monster. Max offered to run everyone over, but they didn't want to separate for long, and she couldn't very well take all of them at once.

When they finally reached the right bend, a soft light ahead of them, Bill stopped everyone and said, "Now r-r-remember, do *not* split up. I-IT loves to take us on one-on-one so it doesn't h-h-h-have t-to work hard. So stay w-w-with us, and fight what we fight."

They nodded, and El gripped Mike's hand even tighter. *Stay with me.* She thought quietly. *Stay with me.*

And then they walked in.

And instantly, Jonathan yelled, "Fuck!"

Up ahead were two floating bodies, easily recognized as a de-transformed Steve and Richie. They all gasped, about to rush forwards, only to realize that up ahead of them, was... something. It was cloaked in shadow for an instant, slight lights turning towards them. And while they couldn't get a good picture of what it was-what it looked like *now* - none of them corrected Max when she said, "That's not a fucking clown."

Bill whispered, "I-I-IT must be trying to d-decide between all our f-f-fears."

After a tense second, Nancy moved first, rushing underneath the floating bodies. They called after her, pancking, but IT didn't seem to move as she did, so they ran after her. Nancy paused in front of the creature, as if waiting to see if it would move towards her, and then she and Jonathan managed to reach up and drag Steve down, while

the Losers surrounded Richie. Mike slowly moved closer to his brother, dragging El along with him, as he stared in amazement.

And then some kind of leg shot out of the darkness towards them, looking almost like a giant spider leg- but that *couldn't* be right, could it? Mike threw up a shield, blocking them from getting hit by it, as the others around him screeched. Nancy glanced behind her and shot out a fireball towards the darkness. The creature yelled, and as Mike dropped his forcefield, Lucas shot out an energy blast, as Bill raised a white cloud out of the air, holding it temporarily inbetween them and the monster. Now that Mike was closer, it was *starting* to look a bit more like a spider.

"What kind of Shelob shit is this?" Lucas asked, horrified.

Not paying attention, Nancy was staring at Steve's vacant eyes.
"What's wrong with him?"

"Stared into the Deadlights." Bev said, as she rushed in front of her friends, raising a dark cloud around them, before thinking better of it and dropping it, letting Lucas take over in that regard.

"How do we fix it?" Dustin asked, running over to the group around Steve.

"Who's dating him again?" Hanlon asked.

"We are." Nancy and Jonathan both said.

"Okay," Ben said, as he started dragging Richie down, "Someone's gotta kiss him."

Nancy and Jonathan glanced to each other, as Bev continued, "Yeah, that's what works."

The lights coming from the shadow of IT seemed to focus towards the adults, and Dustin responded by shooting lightning towards it.

"I, uh, didn't realize this was part of the clown fighting." Nancy said after a second.

"Spider fighting." Will muttered, staring ahead at what the shadow

seemed to be forming.

“Do you want to-” Jonathan began.

“I mean, if you want to try-”

“Well, if you-”

“For fuck’s sake,” Kali interrupted, “ *I’ll* kiss him if you two don’t hurry this up. We have a fucking spider to fight.”

Mike didn’t catch what happened next, because something else was sent towards the Losers- probably another leg, though it was looking more like a claw now. He shot up a forcefield just as Eddie managed to drag Richie down to the ground, shutting his eyes as the field trembled under the impact.

But, well, apparently something happened, because Mike could hear Steve say, “The *fuck* ?”

He glanced that way, and El took the opportunity to send a blast of her own energy at the shadow.

And then a very concerned-sounding Bev said, “Uh, we have a situation.”

“What?” Steve said, looking around. “What the fuck’s going on?” His eyes landed on IT, and he said, “The *fuck* is that?”

“Richie’s not under the Deadlights.” Bev said, staring at him. Mike moved over, looking; indeed, his eyes weren’t clouded like Steve’s, but they were shut, apparently still moving under his lids.

“What’s going on?” Mike asked.

“What’s wrong with him?” Nancy asked, as Jonathan and Dustin pulled Steve aside to give him the run-down.

The Losers glanced to each other, as Eddie finally admitted, “We don’t know .”

And then, Hanlon said, “Guys... *guys* .”

“What?”

Hanlon looked to the Losers, realization dawning in his eyes. “He’s killing IT.”

“Your friends are here. And I’m going to kill them all.”

Good fucking luck.

“It will be easy. They have so much fear. So much fear.”

But they’re together. They’ll fight you. And while they do, I’ll destroy you from here. And I think I’ll have help soon.

“No help is coming for you.”

That’s where you’re wrong, fucker. And guess what? I can kill you. I saw into your most prominent memories, and I saw something you didn’t want me to see. Something you didn’t want anyone to see.

“And what might that be?”

Fear.

35. Ripping out Hearts is a fun Family-Bonding Game

Notes for the Chapter:

Quick thing: Gonna have to let everyone know that there is some pretty... violent shit in this chapter. Proceed with caution.

Also, some notes at the end of the chapter!

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Ripping out Hearts is a fun Family-Bonding Game

“Killing IT?” Nancy asked, panicked. “How?”

Bill turned to the others, and said, “I want to help.”

They all nodded at him. “We’ll go in with you,” Hanlon assured him. “Just grab his hand, it should work.”

“What’s going on?” Lucas asked.

Bill smiled at them all, and then grabbed Richie’s hand, turning towards the flickering lights around IT, and then his eyes shut, too.

“What’s going on?” Joyce repeated.

Bev said, before reaching for Richie’s hand, “Mike, give em the lowdown.”

As Eddie rushed forwards to join hands, too, starting to form a circle, Hanlon said, “We’re going into the Monsters’ head to kill IT in a Ritual, one that we think might actually manage to kill IT once and for all. It might act out physically. We need you to protect us and hurt IT as much as you can. Got it?”

“Uh... sure.” Kali shrugged.

“Why not?” Jonathan muttered. “This is a weird day for us, not gonna lie.”

“Stay safe.” El said carefully, as Ben and Stan joined the circle.

Hanlon smiled at them. “Same to you.” And then he linked hands with Stan and Bill, and his eyes shut.

Then the Spider let out a scream, and moved forwards.

“Well, gang,” Mike said, as everyone turned to him, “Let’s move out.”

And at that, they charged.

Nancy hit it first, a blast of fire sending it screaming again. Will reached into his bag, grabbing onto a red item, and then his fire joined in the attack. El used her powers to push against it, try and knock it away, while Steve started flipping the gravity, and Jonathan summoned a shield to block Dustin, who was sending out bolts of electricity. Lucas’s energy hit it from the sides, and Max started speeding around it, yelling weak spots at the others. Hopper hit the ground, causing it to rumble, while Joyce stuck close to the teens, moving to make them invisible whenever the spider turned their way. Kali had her gun out, shooting and probably making herself invisible, too, and even Mike had his hands out, beams of light shooting out on occasion, but mostly he was running towards whoever looked to be in the most danger, in case they should need a shield.

They were all fighting one thing at once, fighting it together.

And as it let out an unearthly scream, Dustin yelled, “The Losers better be doing something, too! Cause if they just ditched us to fight this thing for them, I’m gonna kill them!”

“What...?”

Richie could feel Bill’s presence beside him, now. He smiled in the darkness, knowing that his friend had come for him.

“How did you know about this?”

“We hallucinated it,” Bill said in his own mind. “Sh-should really be more careful considering what happens when k-k-kids inhale a lot of smoke.”

And then Bev was there. “Alright, where’s the fucker? I want to end this as soon as we can.”

“NO!”

And then Eddie was there. “Guess who’s out of the Lab and ready to kick some ass!”

Richie felt elation. “Eddie!”

Ben came in next, and then Stan, and Richie’s joy only increased. “Kill IT!” Ben screamed within his mind.

“Kill IT!” Stan repeated.

Then Mike was there, the wonderful Mike Hanlon, and all Seven of them were together. “You can’t beat us.” Mike said. “You can’t. We’re all here, and we’re all going to fight you.”

“You CAN’T. I have lived for thousands of years, I can crush you all-”

“You’ve only survived because nobody’s f-f-fought back,” Bill thought. “You’ve never had to plan ar-around them. You’ve never understood what w-w-w-would kill you. You’ve never understood how much we’d give up for each other.”

“You CAN’T...”

“Bill, let’s hurry this up.” Bev thought. “I want to kill this thing before it annoys us to death.”

“I feel like it could do more than that.” Stan thought.

“Not right now, Stannie,” Richie thought.

He didn’t exactly know what they were supposed to do now, but thankfully, Bill seemed to know instinctively. Still gripping Richie’s hand, then started to chant. “He thrusts his f-f-fists...”

“NO!”

Bill started over. “He thrusts his fists against the post, and still insists he sees the ghosts.”

It was a rhyme that Bill was supposed to repeat, once that was supposed to help with his stutter. Though he was a bit confused, Richie joined in. “He thrusts his fists-”

Bev joined, too. “-Against the post-”

Eddie and Ben- “And still insists-”

Stan and Mike- “He sees the ghosts.”

They were all chanting them, feeling themselves charge up their own energy. “He thrusts his fists against the post, and still insists he sees the ghosts...”

And then they were all together, and they were stronger than anything.

The first one to get hurt was Max.

She moved to block Lucas from one of the legs, and screeched as it slashed her across the stomach. Lucas screamed, too, dragging her farther away and trying to slow the blood. Distracted, Kali looked over, and got knocked off her own feet.

“ No !” El screamed, rushing in front of her and using her powers to push IT back a few inches. Mike screamed, too, running behind her and throwing up a field.

Dustin got hit with something, too, and as Steve jumped in front of him, he got slashed across the leg. “Fuck!” he yelled, as Nancy and Jonathan moved to drag them away.

“No!” El screamed again, glaring at the spider. “No! You’re not hurting us! We’re *done* ! We’re not going to leave each other like this!”

And then she turned around. “Mike, drop the field.”

“What?” he looked panicked.

“I’ll be fine. But I want to fight it full-force.” she said. “Drop it.”

Mike hesitated, and then said, “I love you.”

El smiled at him, and then he dropped the field, and she turned around.

She rarely used her powers fully. Usually she just pushed people, made things move, that sort of thing.

But once or twice, while practicing in the woods, she’d focused entirely, and figured out just how much she could destroy.

But she hadn’t ever been this angry before.

So she raised both her hands, looked directly at the animal, and said, “No More.”

And she screamed, feeling her powers burst through her, feeling a blast of telekinesis hit the thing head-on. She didn’t notice as her feet started to lift up, didn’t notice as her fury started fuelling her, starting drowning out the screams around her.

And then IT screeched, and she dropped to the ground, and as Mike helped her back up, she heard the Losers screaming.

“Kill IT!” was Bev’s voice.

“Rip out IT’s heart!” Richie was screaming, and Mike jumped at the familiar voice. “We have to kill it!”

“Fucking hell!” Nancy screamed, but she send a burst of fire to block the sewer exit, which the creature was limping towards.

Lucas whipped out a hand from where he was standing with Max, and the spider lost balance for just a second. That was enough for Bill and Hopper to race over, knocking it over. Bill reached out his hands, white energy bursting forth and hitting the creature, as Hopper said,

“Are you sure?”

“Kill IT!” the Losers were all chanting, running forwards to help him.

And El glanced to Mike and after a second, they ran after them. And the rest of the Party rushed over, too, and they were all pushing, pulling, hitting the spider. Joyce paused after a second, before rushing to the injured members, gathering them together, turning them invisible as they all ripped at the Monster.

And then Bill used his energy to pummel at ITs stomach, so they could all see it black heart, and he took it with his energy into the air, and he crushed it.

There was dead silence for a long time, as the dust that used to be an organ crumpled to the ground, and the creature finally, finally, stopped moving.

They stared at each other- covered in blood, bruises, scratches and sewer water- and then Stan said, as he retracted his talons into his fingers, “That was the most stressful yet cathartic thing I’ve ever done.”

“We just killed IT.” Eddie said, turning to stare at the Losers. “Guys, we *killed IT.*”

And then Richie rushed over, hugging him. “Eds! You’re alright!”

“Of course I am! Get off me, trashmouth!”

Eddie eventually moved over to the injured, healing as much as he could, even though it seemed painful to him.

“I’ve been through worse. That fucker broke my arm once.” Eddie said after helping with Max’s cut, gesturing towards the body.

Around then, they started to notice quite a lot of water rising around them, and they all trekked out of the sewers as fast as they could, with everyone moving around constantly, checking each other to make sure they were alright. Richie was holding Eddie’s arm

excitedly, telling him, “God, I missed all of you! Did you kill those Lab fucks?”

“Yes we fucking did.” Eddie said. “Kal shot Brenner, and the rest of them got taken out by fire and ice and shit.”

“That’s great . We killed all our enemies in one day.”

“Not all of them,” Hopper warned, even as they approached the exit, “There are still other Labs.”

“Piece of cake.” Richie said optimistically. “With Brenner gone, they’ll have issues, hopefully for long enough that we can find them and burn them all to the fucking ground.”

They turned a bend and everyone breathed a sigh of relief as they saw the entrance up ahead, and waded into the faint light of the sunrise, looking up at the sky. The group moved to the grass, where they all glanced at each other. Joyce moved over to her sons, giving them a long hug. Nancy, Steve, Jonathan and Kali all moved to sit together, and soon all four of them were embracing and finally letting themselves rest for a second. After Joyce let go of Will, Dustin dragged him over for a six-way group hug, as the Party Teens all embraced Mike, letting him know that they’d missed him, and none of that shit would happen again. The Losers all hugged, too, and then El rushed over to her Dad, who had been with Joyce, and Dustin ran to Steve, and Mike to Nancy, and Lucas and Max just sat on the ground and laid down, looking as if they’d like to just fall asleep together in the grass.

But after Mike finished hugging his sister, he slowly turned towards the Losers.

And Richie broke off from the rest, and they stared at each other.

Richie moved forwards first, standing only a little bit away from him, as the others realized what was happening and turned to watch.

“Hey, um...” Richie said carefully, looking hesitant and fearful. “You don’t... you don’t remember, but I-”

“*Matthew.*”

A light shone in Richie's surprised eyes, as he instantly turned to look at his brother. There was a small burst of happiness, a faint smile stretching across his shocked face. It was something he hadn't expected to hear, something he used to *hate* hearing, but... well, just for now, he could let that slide.

Mike slowly reached to his grass, picking the stuffed wolf off of a rock and handing it over. It was wet, covered in splashes of water, but it was quite recognizable. Richie gasped as he saw it, reaching to take it from his brother, as Mike said, "Ben's... Ben's energy blast opened the memories." Richie looked up from the toy to Mike, as he continued, "I mean, I'm sorry, I... your name's Richie now, right?"

Richie positively beamed, happy tears coming to his eyes, his voice quivering as he said, "How'd you guess?"

Mike let himself smile. "Special twin powers."

Richie dropped the wolf to the grass, and threw his arms around his brother, and they hugged for a very long time.

And then Mike pulled away and punched him on the shoulder.

"Ow! Hey!"

"You little *shit!*" Mike said. "You wiped my *fucking memory!* You could've died!"

"Oh, are you swearing now?" Richie asked, eyes brightening.

"Shit! Fuck!" Mike let himself laugh, for the first time in forever, and then Richie laughed, too, and after a second, Nancy joined in, and soon they were all laughing together.

Of course, as soon as they stopped, Stan said, "But, uh, Rich, I would like to know what the fuck is going on."

Richie paused. "Uh... secret twins?"

Notes for the Chapter:

Some quick notes:

- We've got two chapters left, technically two epilogues.
- Still not sure what I'm going to do after this: I've limited it so far to "Stranger Things kids in the ASOUE universe" or just a full ASOUE AU fic. Guess we'll have to see.

Love ya! :D

36. Where do we go from here?

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Where do we go from here?

They drove to the abandoned house to clean up before heading back to Hawkins.

There were only two showers, and they all decided pretty quickly to let the ones who'd just been freed clean up first, so Mike and Eddie sat in the Living Room while Stan and Ben washed up, with Eddie sitting inbetween Richie and Bill, holding their hands while laughing at something Hanlon and Bev were saying, and next to Richie, Mike was leaning on El's shoulder and shutting his eyes, just letting himself rest with her. Outside, Will had turned absorbed some blue, and was drenching Lucas, Dustin, Steve and Max with water- the others had decided to simply wait for the shower instead of letting Will splash them as much as he wanted. Mike and El had considered joining them, but, well, they'd rather just sit together for now.

Eventually, Stan moved down, wearing a simple outfit that was apparently already his, as part of the shirt's back was cut out so he could spread his wings. He had them curved over his arms as he wandered over, tapping Eddie to get him to move. Once Eddie hesitantly went upstairs, Stan said, "So, uh, yeah, washing wings is hard."

"You could've retracted them for a bit." Bev suggested.

"Yeah, not gonna happen for a while." Stan shrugged.

And a few minutes later, when Ben came down, Mike glanced at El. "I'll, uh, be right back." he said.

She nodded, glancing outside, where Dustin had apparently said something rude, as Will was blasting him full-force in the face. "I'll be out there if you need me." she said.

Mike nodded, gave her hand another squeeze, and then he went upstairs.

He stopped at the bathroom, which Richie had given him directions to, and once he was inside, he realized that he *really* didn't want the door to be closed. The room was small, *too* small, and he started to feel panic as he moved to shut the door. He managed to maneuver it so that it was only just open, so that he could still see the light from outside, so that he knew there was something out there.

After he'd cleaned up, he noticed that someone had slipped a change of clothes onto the floor. It was one of his own outfits from home; he recognized the sweater, and the rips in the jeans. Nancy must've brought it for him. He wondered if she knew it was his favorite sweater, or if she just guessed.

And after he put it on, he realized that it was the first thing he'd worn that wasn't a hospital gown since he'd been kidnapped. And it was a lot more comfortable, a lot warmer, a lot more like home.

Mike then curled up in the corner of the bathroom and cried into his lap. He just couldn't *help* it, everything that had happened over the past several days just *hit* him in that moment. He figured that he should probably go downstairs, to tell everyone what was going on, to hug them and cry with them instead of being alone, but... well, being alone for now was alright. He didn't want nonstop comfort, he'd gotten that from his friends for weeks after the Accident, and nobody had just let him *exist*, and he didn't want that right now. Right now, he just wanted to let it all out.

And when he finished crying, he checked himself over in the mirror, to make sure his eyes weren't too red, and flinched when he realized there was a very obvious bruise on his cheek. Well, at least he didn't look too upset. He knew he shouldn't hide it from them, but he just didn't want to talk about his feelings at the moment, there'd be time for that later. They'd all talk later.

He went downstairs and sat next to Richie, who reached over and grabbed his hand, smiling as someone else went up to use the bathroom.

“I’m... I’m really glad you’re here.” Richie said softly.

Mike looked back to his brother- his *brother* - and smiled. “I’m glad you didn’t get yourself killed.” he said quietly.

Richie laughed, and leaned over towards his brother. “I’m glad you didn’t, either.”

After everyone had washed up, Joyce drove back from town, where she’d gone to get extra food before they left. And once she did, she gathered everyone in the kitchen, and said, “Well, uh, there’s a situation.”

“S-s-situation?” Bill asked carefully.

“Yeah.” Joyce said. “Apparently there was some kind of storm while we were all outside of town, and the sewers flooded once we got out. The town’s half underwater and several buildings have collapsed.”

“That makes sense.” Bev said, as the other Losers flinched. “IT made the city what it is. Now that it’s gone...”

“Derry’ll probably die.” Stan said.

“What are we going to do?” Ben asked.

“What *can* we do?” Richie replied.

“I don’t think we should do shit.” Eddie said. “This town was built on the ritual sacrifice of children, whether the adults acknowledge it or not. Everyone can move somewhere else.”

“What about our p-p-parents?”

“My Mom can go fuck herself.” Eddie said.

“I think,” Hanlon said, as everyone looked to him, “That we should go to Hawkins. And once we’re safe, we’ll tell our parents we’re alright. We might not be able to give our location until we’re *sure* that nobody will come after us, but I can call my Granddad from a

landline or something, and Ben can contact his Mom and Stan his parents. Bill, you can try to talk to your parents.”

“If they c-c-care-”

“-but really, we should go. There’s nothing for us here, and we still have... a lot to learn about our powers. Where else would be better than with people like us?”

They looked to each other, and then Joyce said, “Well... we’ll start out now, and stop at a hotel on the way back. Would that be alright?”

They all nodded. “Let’s get out of this hellhole.” Bev said.

The ride back wasn’t exactly fun.

They’d all assumed that after they’d destroyed the Lab, their nerves would be down. But, for starters, Stan was constantly jittery, due to the fact that they’d made him retract his wings, since they’d be going out of the bounds of Derry. And once, they passed a car that looked too similar to the Lab’s vans, and they’d all jumped, with the drivers slamming on the gas and being quite a while over the speed limit before they’d realized their mistake. When they’d settled down in their Hotel Rooms for the night, they all checked every window and door about a million times, and Mike kept wandering over to the girls’ room to make sure that Nancy and El were still there. Sometime during the night, too, Bev picked the lock to the boys’ room, locked it again behind her, and then fell asleep next to her boys on the floor, not liking to be separated from them for long. And come morning, when Mike woke up, terrified from a nightmare, his mind automatically assuming he was still in the Lab, he’d freaked out, screaming and curling up in on himself until Will and Lucas managed to calm him down.

Before leaving once again for Hawkins, they all sat outside the vans, and Hopper said, “Lucas, I called your parents. They’ve gone back to their house, they should be safe for now. But we should probably talk about... about what we’re going to tell everybody else.”

“My... my Mom doesn’t have to know.” Dustin said hesitantly. “She’d freak. I don’t want to worry her.” Max nodded in agreement.

Their eyes all flickered to Mike and Nancy and Richie, who were all sitting together; El had her hand over Mike’s, while he leaned onto Nancy’s shoulder, and Richie sat beside them, twirling his shirt in his hands.

“I... we have to tell them.” Mike said, his voice dropping to a monotone. “But I don’t want to. On top of...” He didn’t finish, but they all knew what he meant. *On top of what’s happened, I don’t want to have to deal with their disapproval, too.*

Then, quietly, Nancy said, “Mike, sleep over at someone else’s house tonight. With Richie. I’ll talk to them.”

“Nancy...”

“I’ll talk to them. And if they don’t... I’ll take care of you, Mike. I promise.”

Mike shut his eyes, leaning farther onto her, as Will said, “You can stay with us- if that’s okay, Mom?”

“Of course.” Joyce nodded. “And you-” she looked to the Derry children, “-can stay, too, until we find a place for you. Maybe we can even get some of your parents into town.”

The Losers nodded, though they didn’t look convinced.

All the drive home, everyone stayed quiet; nobody thought to complain about the heavy metal Will wanted to play, or the Disney melodies that El requested. In fact, Mike Wheeler, Richie and Eddie all fell asleep again on the way.

When they arrived in Hawkins, they stopped just outside of town, giving the rental vans back and pretending like it wasn’t odd for them to have much more people than they did when they first left. And then they trekked into town, with Mike keeping his head down and following close to El and Richie.

They all stopped at the Byers’ first, where Mike gave a goodbye hug

to El, Lucas, Max and Dustin, who all promised to come see him as soon as possible. Steve, Kali and Nancy gave a quick hug to Jonathan, too, and then Nancy pulled her brothers aside, giving them the tightest hug she could.

“I’m going to tell them about our powers. And what happened.” she said. “It’s not like we can hide Richie forever. But if they react badly, I’ll stay to take care of you, or Ms. Byers will, or the Chief, or the Sinclairs, or the Hendersons. You’ll be okay. We’re all here for you. You know that, right? We’re here for you.”

The boys both nodded, and Richie said, “Do you want me to come? In case they need a memory wipe, like if they wanna call the cops...”

“I’ll be fine.” Nancy assured him. “I’ll be fine. And I’ll be back soon.”

And after everyone left, Richie dragged Mike and Will back towards the Losers, who all gathered in the Living Room, sitting there while Joyce offered to make food. The Losers all shook their heads, not wanting to be a bother, but after some insistence, Bill and Mike Hanlon got up to help her, refusing to let her make food by herself; Jonathan also joined in pretty fast, and once he was gone, Will admitted, “Thank God. Mom’s a decent cook but Jonathan’s way better.”

They laughed a little, and after a bit, Will turned to Mike and said, “Wanna watch *Star Wars* ?”

Mike nodded, and they all settled down.

It was a week later when they brought the Losers to Castle Byers.

Nancy had shown up at the Byers house on the first night, while they were asleep, and crashed on the couch. While she didn’t tell them exactly what had happened, she did tell the boys that, “Our parents are trying to take it all in. They’ll... they’ll come pick you up when they’ve processed things.”

“And if they don’t?” Mike asked.

Nancy paused. "I'll come back for you."

She eventually had to go off to College with Jonathan and Steve, and after she gave her brothers a million hugs and a million promises she'd be back soon and she'd call as much as she could, she'd left.

On the third day, Hopper had offered to have at least some the kids stay at his house instead; it was a bit bigger than the Byers', and though Joyce would die before admitting it- she couldn't keep feeding nine children forever. Mike wouldn't go anywhere Richie didn't, and he did like the idea of being able to see El all day, so they ended up staying there for a while, with the boys sleeping in the living room and Bev setting up a cot in El's bedroom. Mike kind of liked this setup; he got to hang out with El as much as he wanted- she'd even let him sit in on some of her online classes for a bit- and he could catch up with his brother, figure out what had happened while he was gone and tell him everything that had happened to him. Kali also seemed to enjoy the extra company, and invited the Losers up to paint on her wall with her.

An added benefit was help after nightmares. Whenever Mike woke up from nightmares, Richie would hug him and calm him down while someone else went up to get El, and then his brother and his girlfriend would be there, and they could help. Eddie, Ben and Stan had pretty bad nightmares, too, and more often than not Mike would wake up to all the Losers piled together, having fallen asleep while hugging.

The Nightmares weren't the only lingering issues the Lab had left them with, of course. Every now and again, if things were too quiet, Mike would wonder if this was actually real, if he'd actually got out or if this was some elaborate dream, and every time someone touched him without warning, he'd immediately freaked out and thrown up a shield around himself. After that had happened the first time, Mike had gone to sit in El's room with her, and she'd mentioned, "I did that, too. For a bit. I didn't like touch."

Mike'd glanced up at her, and he'd said, "I'm so fucking sorry. I... I just... you were there for *so long*..."

"I'm not there now." El said, biting her lip and looking to the ceiling,

saying it for herself as much as for him. “I’m not there now and they can’t hurt me again. And they won’t hurt you again, either.”

He hadn’t been sure then. But every day, it was getting a bit easier to believe.

The rest of the Party visited every day, as soon as school was out. Will was really missing Jonathan, but he and his Mom had been making themselves busy, writing down and categorizing all the powers they knew of, trying to make their own research on powers. Max and Dustin’s Mom had been a bit worried about how quiet they were after their “trip”, but otherwise didn’t seem to suspect what had happened. Lucas’s parents had been a bit more upset, seeing as Lucas couldn’t quite hide his vigilante-ness from them anymore, but they couldn’t exactly *stop him*, so they just asked him to be safe. One day, Lucas brought Erica along with him to meet the Losers, and she’d instantly bonded with Bev, which didn’t quite make Lucas feel secure, as Bev kept offering to teach her how to use throwing knives.

And after about a week, while they were all in the Living Room again, Mike said, “How’s the Castle?”

“Still there.” Will shrugged.

“Can... can I see it?” Richie asked. “It sounds cool.”

They all looked to the Party, and they shrugged. “Sure. Why not?” Max said.

So they all went on foot, laughing and letting the sun hit their faces. Mike was hand-in-hand with both El and Richie as they walked, while Max kept joking about how if she fell on a branch and broke her leg, she was going to make Lucas carry her the whole way there. For a bit, Mike almost fooled himself into thinking they were normal kids.

And when they reached the castle, the Losers *flipped*, rushing around and gawking at everything.

“This is *way cooler* than the Underground Clubhouse!” Ben cheered, his and Hanlon’s eyes both lighting up at the bookshelf.

“Uh, you can say that again!” Eddie said, his and Bev’s eyes glowing in a similar way as he looked at the weapons wall.

“Wh-what’s this?” Bill said, approaching the supercomputer.

“That’s our pride and joy.” Dustin said, rushing over to show him. “It can hack into, like, *anything*.”

“Not that we hack into government files for fun, or anything.” Max said, leaning against the wall and smirking. “On an unrelated note, Area 51 is bullshit.”

“We can try to help you guys transform here,” El offered, glancing towards Eddie, Ben, and Stan, who hadn’t exactly had time to practice.

“Could we go out and fight crime with you guys?” Eddie asked, perking up.

“Abso-fucking-lutely!” Lucas said.

And as they all rushed to inspect the practice room, El glanced over to see that Mike had wandered to the Computer, staring up at the screen in a small concern. “You okay?” she asked, leaning against the keyboard as she looked over at him.

Mike paused, glancing up at the screen again, before saying, “While I was... while I was there... they said that there were other Labs. I don’t know if... if any other kids were there but... there could be. There could be and we can’t just leave them...”

El bit her lip. They’d just gotten *out* of her Lab, they’d just finished all of this... but Mike was right. God knew what those fuckers would do if they were left alone.

“Might be a fun winter break activity.” El finally said, and Mike looked at her in surprise. “Tracking down a Lab and burning it again.”

“And if there are kids in there?”

“We’ll get them out.” El said. “Take them back with us.”

“Don’t think your house has *that* much room.”

“We’ll find somewhere. That half-burned Arcade might be for sale, we could make a building.”

“A superhero hideout in the middle of town?”

“We could go full X-Men, call it a boarding school. Or an outreach program, isn’t that what Max’s Mom thinks she’s doing?”

“Still, might work better just outside of town. So nobody gets spotted.”

“I mean, that could work...”

They looked at each other carefully, and then Mike said, “This is gonna be our lives, isn’t it? We’re superheroes now. It’s our job.”

“We might have to get actual jobs.” El then smiled, and then she let out a laugh. “Sorry, I just imagined you becoming a journalist and getting glasses to disguise your face.”

“As *if* .” Mike said, finally smiling- seeing him smile lately had been really nice. “I will only get glasses when I’m pretending to be my brother.”

“Hmm, I think I’d be able to tell it was you.”

“Well, *yeah* , but no one else would.”

“I think you’d be obvious.”

“Well, we’ll have to try it. We did it once in Pre-School and it totally would’ve worked if Richie hadn’t had shitty-ass vision and run into a wall.”

Not able to help herself, El burst into laughter, and Mike joined in, getting them confused glances from the rest of the teens, who were waiting for Ben to try and transform inside the practice room.

And once they finished laughing, Mike said, “El?”

“Hmm?”

Mike smiled, glancing towards the other teens, who had gone back to all cheering something towards Ben, and then back to her, and he said, “I think we’re gonna be okay.”

“Yeah?”

Mike nodded. “Maybe... maybe not today. But eventually. I think things’ll work out.”

“I think so, too.” El said, and then she reached out to grab his hand.
“Come on. Let’s go see what they’re doing to poor Ben.”

37. Epilogue - Who put these Kids in Charge?

Notes for the Chapter:

GOD I'M SO EMOTIONAL RN

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Epilogue - Who put these kids in Charge?

Four Years Later

It was November again, and Max burst into the room, clearly just getting out of speedmode, as she said, “Are we allowed to issue detentions?”

Mike looked up, giving her a confused look. “We’re not *actual* teachers, Max.”

“Well, we need *some* way to keep Kate and Emmaline from constantly making out in the hall.” Max sighed, sitting down at the table, next to Lucas. “They keep blocking doorways and lockers and shit.”

As she continued ranting about the other powered residents of what Will had dubbed “New Castle Byers”, Mike stole a glance out the window, seeing the trees just outside. Their residence wasn’t just them anymore; Nancy, Steve, Kali and Jonathan practically lived in the attic, while Joyce and Hopper might as well live there, too. And they’d picked up quite a few more powered kids they’d had to smuggle across the country, or pretended to recruit into an “Exclusive Outreach Program.” There were the kids from Oregon, and California, Erica and her friends, and then those kids from... which State was it again? Somewhere in the midwest...

“Oh! That reminds me!” Mike said, interrupting Max, who’d just had a quick argument with Dustin over their rights as administrators, “We just got some new kids, just got into town and ran into Stan and Bill

on patrol. We were gonna put them in a dorm, but they don't wanna be split up."

"I think they're siblings." Will said, having also been present when Stan had brought them in.

"Anyway, Bev and El are taking them on tour, we've gotta find a spot to put them." Mike finished.

"Well, no one uses the second art room, we could all move it into one spot." Max said. "Will, wanna help me move shit? It's mostly your studio anyway."

"Ugh, alright." Will said, putting down his book and grabbing onto Max's arm. She gave Lucas a quick kiss on the cheek and then dashed away, dragging Will along.

"I'll go see how El's doing." Mike offered, jumping up.

Lucas nodded. "I can check on the kids in the training room. If they blew up the fireplace again, though, I'm gonna kill them."

"Please don't."

"No promises."

"Oh, and I can take over the Library shift from Mike and Ben." Dustin said. "Although they might not want to leave- I swear to God they would *live* there if we let them."

Mike gave his friends a quick smile, before running off, figuring that El would be bringing the newbies to the attic now. As he ran down the halls, he could hear Stan and Jonathan in one room trying to coach one of the kids on how best to control his shapeshifting, and Nancy and Steve, in the shooting gallery, showing two kids how to use their built-in projectiles. Kali and Bill were in the art room with some of the kids, as Will and Max raced past him, dropping things off in the corner while the others painted a wall, completely unbothered by the new materials being shoved in behind them.

As Mike reached the staircase to the attic, the door swung open, and Richie, Eddie and Bev came down, chatting amiably.

“Hey!” Mike waved, and Richie’s eyes lit up.

“Mikey!” he said, beaming. “Hey, tell Eddie that I actually used to eat cereal with ketchup instead of milk.”

“You absolutely *did not*.” Eddie shot back.

“Afraid he did. He’s disgusting.” Mike said, as Bev roared with laughter and Eddie groaned, putting his head in his hands. “Oh, Rich, Holly’s coming over tonight. She wants you to help her with History homework, apparently you’re better at it than me.”

“Well, I got a lot of reading done while I was living alone.” Richie shrugged. “Just have her meet me in the computer room, Eddie and I are trying to track down two runaways somewhere in Ohio.”

“We think one of them’s an empath and one’s hemokinetic, but we’re not sure.” Eddie said. “This is just from reports we hacked into.”

“Good luck, then.” Mike said, as Richie gave him a side-hug and then raced off with Eddie, saying something about how ketchup and cheerios wasn’t all bad, really, Mike’s eating habits were way worse. “Oh, Bev?”

“Yeah?”

“How’d the tour go?”

“Pretty good, I think.” Bev shrugged. “The kids still don’t wanna be separated, and I think they’re on the run from a cult or something? Wouldn’t go anywhere with us until we took our shoes and socks off. Weird kids. We’re letting them sleep in the rec room until we find a spot for them or convince them to use the dorms.”

“Will and Max’re combining the art rooms.”

“Yeah, that’ll work.” Bev said. “And, yeah, El’s still up there, if that’s your next question.”

“The attic?”

“The roof.”

Mike smiled and thanked her, and then rushed up the stairs.

“How’s the sky look?”

El looked around, her hair falling over her shoulder as she smiled at Mike, who’d just climbed onto the roof with her. He moved to sit next to her, staring over the forest, as she said, “Pretty sunny.”

“New recruits give you any trouble?”

“I think they’ll be fine. Very nervous, clearly just escaped from somewhere, but... well, reminds me of us.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah.”

“So you’re saying they’ll be alright.”

El nodded, and after a second, she held out her hand for him. “Wanna go flying?”

Mike grinned, grabbing her hand, and then they started floating. They laughed, looking down at the forest beneath them. They stayed above the trees, floating and smiling for a while, until Richie pulled open the door and yelled, “Hey, lovebirds! Cyrus and Will flooded the fucking basement, we need your help!”

“For fuck’s sake, again?” Mike called, as El burst into more laughter.

They landed on the roof just as Richie rushed back down, and glanced at each other. El brushed a strand of hair out of her face, still giggling, and said, “Well, let’s go see what shit they got up to now.”

Mike gave her a quick kiss, and then they ran back downstairs, knowing that no matter how many problems came their way, at least they were all together. And that was all they could really ask for.

Notes for the Chapter:

YEAH THIS IS A LOT OF EMOTIONS FOR ME I ACTUALLY CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS OVER?

Firstly, I'd like to thank all of you, especially everyone who left such nice comments the last few chapters??? you all are literal angels I love you

Secondly, yeah I've basically decided that since S3 is like a year away and I'd have to wait a long time for Robin, a character I may not even like (but I probably will bc I like most people), I'm just gonna write the ASOUE AU now. I'm not sure whether reading/watching ASOUE would be super necessary, seeing as a lot of it IS the kids finding out the VFD mystery, but if you have read the books, I'm basing almost all of the VFD stuff on snicketsleuth's theory "What caused VFD's schism?" because there's so much evidence there I'm basically accepting it as canon. So long story short VFD isn't gonna be shown in as good a light as in Season 2 of the Show...

And also I'm gonna be using the Shatter method of Chapter Titling because the chapter titles were half the fun lol.

[If you'd like a preview of the ASOUE/ST fic, I'm basing it off my gifset here: <https://whencartoonruletheworld.tumblr.com/post/174153148187/>]

Hope to see you all there, whenever I actually start publishing, and thank you again for reading Shatter!
:D :D :D

~ Midas